



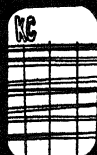
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The tiger house party

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THE TIGER HOUSE PARTY



*Emily Hahn*

THE TIGER HOUSE PARTY

KISSING COUSINS

DIAMOND

CHIANG KAI-SHEK

LOVE CONQUERS NOTHING

PURPLE PASSAGE

A DEGREE OF PRUDERY

ENGLAND TO ME

MISS JILL

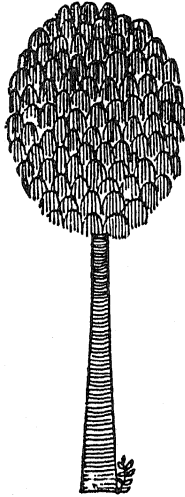
RAFFLES OF SINGAPORE

HONG KONG HOLIDAY

CHINA TO ME

MR. PAN

THE SOONG SISTERS





# The Tiger House Party

*The last days of the Maharajas*

by Emily Hahn

LINE DRAWINGS BY  
ELLEN RASKIN

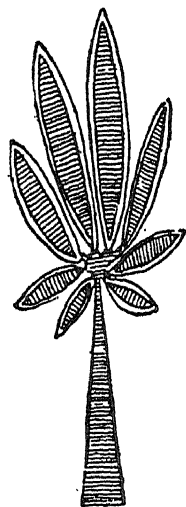
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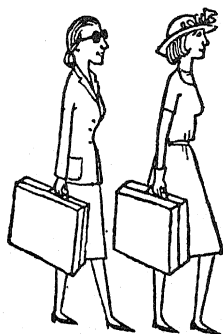
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# A Question of Existence





A headline in the British newspaper I was skimming through read, "INDIAN PRINCES THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION." It made me wonder. My impression was that the Indian princes were already extinct; at any rate, I recalled a lot of comment to that effect when India became independent, a decade earlier. In those days, British publishers were bringing out one rueful book of memoirs after another, with such titles as *Kingdoms of Yesterday* and *Glory Fled*, written by retired British Army officers and Anglo-Indian civil servants. It would not be fair to say that all these books were alike, but they did have in common a strong note of defensive nostalgia: defensive of the institution of the princely state in India, and nostalgic for India in general—India, that is, under the British and the princes. Before burying the princes once and for all, the writers had lifted their spades in a last, sad salute. Now, reading the story beneath the headline, I learned that the extinction the princes were threatened with was merely financial: the government of India seemed on the verge of cracking down on them with new taxes. When I thought about it seriously, I realized that the

princes had not, of course, been beheaded, or even exiled, but merely dethroned, and I grew curious about what they were up to. As a matter of fact, I had been in India back in 1956, and I could remember hearing talk of some current Highnesses while I was there, though I hadn't thought much about them at the time. Evidently, the princes were still around, even if they didn't seem to be making much of a splash.

At length, these cogitations led me to write to an Indian woman I know who lives in Bombay and has family connections in politics. I told her that I was interested in how the maharajahs were making out in the new order, and that, since I was planning to be in Bombay soon, I would appreciate it if she could help me size up the situation by introducing me to a few of them. (Though, like many other people, I frequently confer the title of maharajah on all Indian potentates—or, rather, ex-potentates—I do so only for simplicity's sake. Actually, many of them have never been called maharajah, meaning "great king"; the Moslems among them are known as nawabs, the title of the native sovereigns of Hyderabad is Nizam, Baroda has always had its Gaekwar, and there are ranas and maharanas, raos and maharaos, as well as combinations of some of these designations.) My friend's reply was prompt but puzzling. She declared that she couldn't make out what on earth I was talking about. "There are no maharajahs," she wrote. "They do not exist. How can I introduce you to people who don't exist?"

Well, granting that premise . . . Still, as I have indicated, I had good reason to suspect that my friend was



wrong. I was as mystified by her letter as she had professed to be by mine, but I knew from experience that Indians always have some line of reasoning when they make flat statements that, like this one, appear to fly in the face of fact; there was no use speculating about my friend's position until we could get together and talk it over. So I put the problem aside and wrote to other acquaintances in Bombay, asking *them* about my chances of meeting some maharajahs. Their replies were much more satisfactory. The place was full of maharajahs, I was assured; all I would need to do was come along and see for myself.

As things turned out, I didn't have to press my friend about her mystifying letter. I was in London just before starting on my journey to Bombay, and while there I stopped in to see an official at India House. When I told him that I hoped to meet some maharajahs, his reaction was exactly like hers, except that he was more explicit. "Meet some maharajahs?" he said. "Maharajahs!" The word seemed to distress him. "I simply cannot understand why people are always asking about them," he went on. "My dear lady, there are no more maharajahs. Moreover, they're not at all interesting. How can they be, when they no longer exist? It's not reasonable, this preoccupation with the past."

"But, strictly speaking, and official attitudes aside, they do still exist, don't they?" I asked. "Corporeally?"

"Oh, from that point of view . . ." he began, and his tone was scornful. Then, shrugging off corporeality, he continued sternly, "What you don't seem to grasp is that they have no more power. The princely lands have been inte-

grated into our new provinces and states. Integrated. Do let me present you with a map that shows the whole thing—the arrangement of the new provinces, I mean. The old maps, you understand, are out of date.” He rummaged about in a desk drawer until he found what he wanted. “Here we are!” he said. “Look at this. You see? The outlines are all redrawn. Here, take it. Keep it if you wish. Study it, study it.” As I put the paper away in my bag, he settled back, with a relieved expression, and said, in a gentler voice, “Our policy now is to look forward to a happier time. That part of India’s history, you understand, is unpleasant to us. We wish to forget about those years.”

When I suggested that since those years are part of India’s history his people could hardly hope to blot them out merely by adopting a policy, he replied, “It is only that I don’t think you ought to go to India and dig into all that nonsense. I urge you to visit the new projects instead—the dams, the factories, the public housing.”

I n Bombay, things seemed pretty much the same as when I had been there last. The ordinary social world didn't appear to pay much attention to the official policy, and certain maharajahs still held their due place in party conversation. His Highness of This was in town, His Highness of That had recently returned from Paris, and His Highness of the Other was going to be an ambassador. Now and then, at some big function, I encountered a maharajah or a maharanee in passing. One is bound to. I don't know how India compares in prince-per-capita statistics with countries like Thailand, which are also fairly well stocked with royalty, but it must come high on the list, for its total number of deposed rulers has been estimated at just short of six hundred, ranging all the way from lowly Highnesses with domains of fifty acres to giants like the Nizam of Hyderabad. If anyone should ask how it is that all these Highnesses are alive and kicking and still using their titles in a republican country, the reply might be: Well, if it comes to that, what about France? In fact, the Indian princes might be justified in claiming to be more princely than French princes, because

with the French it is all ancient history by this time—a matter of courtesy titles, handed down for generations—but the Indians are fresh off the throne. They are *it*, they themselves are the dispossessed, and for many of their former subjects they still retain something of the quality of rulers. Besides, Hinduism and the caste system are involved in the whole business, and they help make deroyalizing something more than a problem to be solved overnight by proclamation.

In one way, though, the princes' position is extremely clear. Some of them are very rich and some are less rich, but since India received its independence all of them have had to curtail their expenditures. One can still see the process at work, especially at auctions; the jewelry shops bear testimony to it, too, but the auctions are more dramatic. While I was in Bombay, His Highness the Maharajah of Kashmir, through his business manager, was auctioning off what would generally be considered superfluous belongings. He had such a superfluity of them, in fact, that the sales, which were held once a week, went on and on—a long-drawn-out series. They took place in his Bombay residence—a great hilltop palace, which he intended to sell, in its turn, when it was no longer needed for auctions—and one afternoon I attended a preview of one, escorted by my host and hostess, a British couple, who live in Bombay and were interested in bidding for some of the items they had seen listed in a newspaper. They were soon going to move to another house, and had been following the sales for several weeks, hoping to find various items that they would need in their new

home, and also to pick up something for a recently married daughter, Mary.

"You simply can't buy European furniture here except in this way, because of the import restrictions," my hostess explained as we drove up a steep ramp leading to the palace. "Indian things are nice to look at, but it's my experience that they don't last as long as European things, and these maharajahs always bought the best."

"Not always," said her husband. "There's a lot of junk mixed in."

We came to a stop on a plateau that, spread out in front of the palace, served as its parking area and commanded an excellent view. A number of people, mostly Indians, stood chatting on a wide stairway that led up to a veranda and the palace doors, which were wide open. It was a warm day, and the huge building, with its doors opened and with no curtains or blinds at its windows, looked strange; usually, in the early afternoon, Bombay houses are closed and shuttered against the sun. Walking in, we found ourselves in a large, square hall, and in the midst of a sauntering crowd, made up, my hostess told me, mostly of people who were there for the same reason she was—to look things over and decide what to bid for when the sale was held. "Then, of course, there are the Parsis, who seem fascinated by these auctions," she added. The Parsis—members of a religious sect whose ancestors came to India centuries ago from Persia—play a large part in Bombay's business life. "Of course, a lot of the Parsis are dealers," my hostess remarked, "but some who

aren't and who don't intend to buy anything, even for themselves, come along anyway, just to have a look."

At that moment, I recognized a Parsi I know, a man who owns a jewelry shop in the middle of town, and I called my hostess's attention to him. "Yes, I rather expected him to be here," she said. "The notice of this sale made a special point of one of the lots, described as jewelry. It might be anything—anything at all."

"Jaipur necklaces?" I asked hopefully. I've always liked those ornate necklaces, made of enamel and precious stones.

"Well, it might be," my host said. "It might also be Woolworth costume stuff. At these affairs, you simply never know."

Beyond the hall was a relatively small room, and on either side were two vast rooms, stretching out to the ends of the building. The hall and all three rooms had been cleared of whatever furnishings, carpets, and wall decorations they had once contained, and now looked rather like a museum, being filled with objects neatly displayed and each bearing a number. In the small room, which we had a look at first, were three long tables arranged in the shape of a U, on one of which, stacked in rows, like the merchandise on the counters of a drygoods store, were bolts of cloth, each with a sample unfolded—old brocade, new brocade, lace, linen, plush, mattress ticking, thick silk sheeting—as well as matching curtains and slipcovers. On the other tables were sheets and pillowcases and bedspreads and tablecloths. Some of them had never been used, though they were yellow with age, and some were so worn that I wondered why they

hadn't been thrown away. The same thing was true of a collection of bath towels—enough of them to stock a good-sized hotel. Half of one of the tables was given over to rugs of many sizes, and two big, splendid Persian carpets hung on one of the walls, with a few odds and ends of embroidery tacked up near them. A man in a Gandhi cap was studying the carpets very closely. "Dealer," said my host.

At his wife's request, my host made a penciled note about a length of brocade, and then we moved on to one of the side rooms. Along its walls were ranged carved chests interspersed with a bewildering variety of chairs and, here and there, a glass-fronted cabinet full of china, glass, and silver. In the center of the room stood a long table loaded with more china and glass and silver, as well as a sea of small objects impossible to describe en masse, like the contents of a gift shop. In most auctions of possessions from private homes, there is an underlying note of pathos; no matter how banal the thought may be, it is difficult not to feel a pang that is almost guilt at the sight of a family's battered desks and tables, about to be dispersed to the highest bidders. His Highness's sale was antiseptically free of all that. There was simply too much heaped on the plate. No fragile, vague sense of sympathy could have stood up against the overwhelming profusion of things. It seemed to me that a family with all that stuff couldn't possibly have loved any special bits of it; there wouldn't have been time. We walked up and down, scanning silver beer tankards, great delft plates, row on row of heavy and elaborate silver picture frames, bronze waterfowl, porcelain gun dogs. On a table near a window were

four or five small leather boxes standing open, and I went over to look at them, thinking they might contain some Jaipur necklaces or bracelets resting on satin linings. Instead, I found a few items similar to those in a pawnshop window at home—a man's gold wristwatch, a little brooch set with a small green stone, a diamond solitaire ring, and the like. The jeweler I had recognized was sitting on the window sill chatting with another Parsi. When he had greeted me, he said, indicating the ring, "That's about the only interesting thing in the lot, and it's not too good."

Meanwhile, my companions had found something that attracted them—four wide, shallow wooden chests full of flat silver. "We'll try for one of these tomorrow," my hostess said. "They're amazingly complete. Mary would love one, and I hope they don't cost the earth. Look, this set has everything you can think of, even things to eat asparagus with—not that she's likely to be serving asparagus for the next few years, poor child, on John's salary. I do hope we can get it. It's the only one of the four without His Highness's monogram."

"Then we've got a chance," her husband said. "Most people love a royal monogram, and that runs up the price."

In the other large room, we glanced at some more porcelain statues and an assortment of splendid luggage, including a trunk whose whole interior was divided up into compartments for shoes. Then, after my friends had jotted down some notes about a drawing-room desk and a number of chairs, we finished our tour, walking out of the entrance hall—past a collection of rather bad sporting prints in



carved gilt frames, a few marble-topped dressing tables, and an *art-nouveau* magazine rack—into the warm air of Bombay. "I expect they'll pull this house down," said my host. "The land must be worth more than they'd ever get for the building."

Again I tried to muster regret for something that was passing, and again I failed. "It's queer," I said. "I like maharajahs all right, and it certainly gives me no pleasure to think they're in the same boat with Fifth Avenue millionaires and British dukes—obliged to sell. But I feel— Oh, I don't know—I feel indifferent about this place."

We all turned and looked back at the open-doored, deadpan palace, and my host said, "I know what you mean. I think probably His Highness himself feels pretty indifferent, if that makes your reaction any easier to understand. This is only one palace, and he has so many. He may even find this retrenchment and pulling in of horns something of a relief."

"Within limits," his wife added. "As long as it doesn't go *too far*."

Next day, my friends bid for, and got, the chest of unmonogrammed flatware and the drawing-room desk. We didn't discuss His Highness's hypothetical feelings any further, but I went on thinking about the subject. In one way, at least, I decided, the new order might very well be a relief to a big-time prince. Reading some of the memoirs I have mentioned, I had gathered that in the days of British rule the maharajahs had had to take in a constant procession of Western visitors, all ravening to go out and shoot big game. I recalled something I had once been told in Lahore, by a man whose house bristled with mounted heads. "We have plenty of antelope and that sort of thing here in the hills of the Punjab, but not a lot of tiger," he said, "so in the old days it wasn't always convenient when some V.I.P. came out this way and said he wanted to get a cat. Several times, we had to send down to Rajasthan and have them ship us one in a hurry. They've got plenty there, of course. Occasionally, a big-wig would come up by rail, itching to go out and get his tiger, while, unbeknownst to him, the tiger was traveling on the same train, up ahead in the van."

It was all a part of the accepted pattern before independence. The general idea was that the British authorities were nice to the princes and the princes were nice to the authorities, and even to friends of the authorities and to anybody else of importance from the West. A few rich rulers, who had a reputation for being both exceptionally pro-Western and lavishly hospitable, maintained elaborate guesthouses for not always invited guests. Enthusiastic big-game hunters came from all over the world and lived in these establishments, and their hosts arranged shoots for them. The less affluent princes entertained a vast number of smaller dignitaries—civil servants, say, and Army officers stationed in India—who wanted to indulge a taste for shooting or pigsticking. Sometimes these visits, grand or modest, were based on genuine friendship between guest and host, and sometimes they weren't. In the circumstances, there can't have been a great deal of real cordiality between Briton and prince, but certainly there was some, and the generation of princes that ruled in the years just before independence were at least spared the indignity known by their grandfathers, from whom the British were apt to demand a lot more perquisites a lot more brusquely. Even so, a considerable number of the latter-day Europeans must have been a nuisance. There were some who managed to spend practically the whole year visiting Indian princes, moving from one guesthouse to the next. Their hosts didn't bother them, and, as long as they were comfortable, they didn't bother their hosts. But the free-loaders didn't stint themselves, assuming cheerfully that His Highness wouldn't mind, be-

cause he was so very, very rich and had great heaps of jewels stowed away. When they wanted a bottle or two of liquor, they sent their guesthouse servants over to the palace for it, and any stray qualm they may have felt was easily stifled by the reflection that if it hadn't been for the British Crown, these princes wouldn't be in power at all. His Highness—any Highness—might have had a different opinion about that, claiming that his ancestors were doing all right before the Europeans ever moved in on India. But for years and years, apparently, no Highness had openly said such a thing. There may not be a statute of limitations on historical grievances, but the Indian princes, in general, acted as if there were.

As a matter of fact, in the first few decades of this century, royal Indians had good reason for not assailing the Crown. The commoners of India, when they were clamoring for independence, naturally felt that they had everything to gain. The princes, with a few exceptions, didn't clamor, because they had a good deal to lose, and this silence of theirs caused much bitterness among the insurgents; one of Moscow's favorite phrases—"running dogs of British Imperialism"—was bandied about quite a bit in India. The princes were caught between two fires. On the one hand was the certainty that their status wouldn't be tolerated in an independent India; on the other was their natural dislike of the subservience imposed on them by the British. Their position was exceedingly complicated, and their emotions must have been badly mixed. But then their position

had always been complicated—ever since the early days of British occupation.

The conquest of India wasn't an out-and-out incursion, like, say, the conquest of Mexico. About the beginning of the seventeenth century, British pirates, and then British traders representing the East India Company, began sailing along the edges of the subcontinent. The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the French were showing a similar interest in India, and now and then bands of men from one or another of these nations would land somewhere on its shores and try to settle, fighting the natives when they found it necessary to do so. Sometimes they were beaten off and sometimes they weren't. Wherever they found a foothold, they stayed. The British East India Company not only spread out among the Indians but succeeded, ultimately, in driving out its European rivals everywhere except from pockets like French Pondicherry and the various bits and pieces that are still known as Portuguese India. From the time the company first moved in until the palmy days when India came to be looked upon as the biggest jewel in the Imperial Crown, Bombay and Madras were the two principal centers of British activity. From these two ports, on opposite coasts, British influence seeped steadily inland. The company repeatedly sent its forces in to battle a stubborn ruler and add his kingdom to its territory, though they generally let him continue to rule. By 1833, the British felt strongly enough entrenched to change their strategy. They decided that the local rulers were serving no good purpose, and that the same was true of the whole system of subdivisions, or

states, over which the rulers presided. Therefore, the British, in the parts of India where they had gained the upper hand, simply threw the rulers off their thrones and dissolved the states, annexing the land outright. It was a disastrous policy, and Mr. V. P. Menon, formerly a high-ranking adviser in the Indian Civil Service under the British and more recently an outstanding figure in his country's independent government, has described how it unsettled the life not only of the princes but of the people:

Rulers dispossessed of their States had to get rid of their vast retinue of servants and dependents. Disinherited heirs and cast-off retainers sighed in vain for their lost estates and pensions. The disbanded armies of the rulers had thrown out many thousands of able-bodied men who with arms but without any means of livelihood were roaming about the countryside. . . . It was surely the despair and discontent caused by this upheaval that provided the powder magazine to the Great Revolt of 1857, whatever might have been the spark that ultimately ignited it.

The Great Revolt, which some may not recognize under that name, is what Western history books refer to as the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

Even in Whitehall, the harm resulting from these methods finally became apparent, and in 1858 Queen Victoria announced, after listening to her advisers, that the Crown

would acquire no more territory in India. Such princes as still remained in power were thus saved from dethronement in the nick of time, and in most cases their heirs continued to rule right up to 1947. But they were by no means fully sovereign; rather, they were almost-kings, or sub-kings, subject to admonishment by agents of the British Crown, and even, under certain conditions, to deposition and banishment. Whether these kings liked it or not, they co-operated, since in the beginning some who failed to co-operate—who tried, for instance, simply to pull out of the Empire—were briskly bounced off their thrones. After a few misadventures, even the most simple-minded maharajah got the idea. As time went on, a highly amenable set of heirs took over, a lot of them young men who had been educated by British tutors. Princely rebellion quickly became passé—a highly desirable state of affairs, from the British point of view, since, in area, these states added up to nearly half of India—and by the nineteen-thirties the modern-style maharajah had evolved. He was a familiar figure in Europe. He played cricket and golf and polo and tennis; he was to be seen on the Riviera, in Paris, in London. He bred race horses and patronized the best tailors and bought pretty things, and sometimes things, like most of those I saw up for sale in the Bombay palace, that were not so pretty.

After the Second World War, events moved swiftly on the Indian subcontinent. First, the British decided to clear out and to create two new, independent countries—India and Pakistan. Then interim, or shadow, governments of Indians and Pakistanis were set up, and finally, on June 3,

1947, Lord Mountbatten, the British Viceroy, announced his country's willingness to let the two interim governments assume full power any time they wished. They thereupon set the date for August 15. One of the first problems that faced India and Pakistan was what to do about the princes. The princes themselves were worried enough, but they weren't more worried than the interim ministers. These men knew better than to try again what the British had undertaken a century earlier—the wholesale annihilation of states. It was no use pretending that times had changed and that deposing the princes would not work the havoc it had then, because times had not really changed so much. Under the British occupation, India was like an egg preserved in water glass. The shell had altered a little through the years, but the inside was much the same as before the British arrived; the mass of the people were still living a feudal existence. Some of the princely states were thickly populated; to do away with their princes would again throw thousands of persons who were dependent upon the existing system into the city streets and the country byways. Yet what else could be done about the princes? India and Pakistan were both to become republics, and how could one set up a republic while retaining hundreds of monarchs, however petty their domains? And some of the domains weren't so petty anyway.

After some discussion, the planners in both countries resolved to proceed on the assumption that the princes, if not their people, had kept up with history and would be reasonable about the impending changes. In India, V. P. Menon



was delegated to go and talk with the princes, one by one—or group by group, if possible, to speed matters up—and, by appealing to their common sense and their consciences, gently persuade them to throw in their lot with the new order. Since throwing in their lot meant surrendering all princely authority, consenting to merge their states into refashioned provinces, and slipping quietly and with good grace out of their throne rooms, one might suppose that Menon's chances of success were slim. But this was India, where reactions are not always what the Western world might expect, and Menon had a better understanding of his compatriots than Westerners have. Generally speaking, Indians are law-abiding and high-principled, and when he appealed to the rulers in the name of common good, a surprising number of them saw things his way. It would have been too much to expect that they all would, however. Menon was empowered to promise each prince who agreed to step down compensation in the form of a tax-free privy purse and a guarantee that he and his immediate heir could continue to use their titles—measures designed to cushion the economic and the psychological shocks of readjustment—but some rulers held out for better terms than Menon offered, while others flatly refused to consider the proposition on any terms whatever. Moreover, some who at first were inclined to go quietly jibbed when the negotiations got around to details; the sinking of their state boundaries in the radical mergers that were contemplated angered or frightened them. They eventually backed down, and, as they did so, they must have had bitter thoughts about the

British for moving out and leaving them to face the music alone.

All these recalcitrant souls had to be somehow coaxed, cajoled, or scared into submission, and the methods employed, again, don't fit in with Western ideas. There was no nonsense about fair play or anything like that, and some parts of *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, a book Menon later wrote about how he tackled the job, strike me as remarkably cold-blooded. But he is frank, at least, and if he doesn't go into detail about some of the means he resorted to in bringing the princes to heel, one feels it was for lack of space, and not because he had any compunction about resorting to them. For example, one incident that I heard about from a Bombay journalist involved a few princes who banded together and refused to sign the agreement that Menon presented to each of them. (He presented the same agreement to every prince in India—the Instrument of Accession, as it was called.) One day, after weeks of argument, they were to meet with him in his office to discuss matters further. They turned up promptly, in a defiant mood, but they were also anxious, naturally, and Menon was aware of that. He purposely kept them waiting in his anteroom for an hour or more, to give their anxiety time to prevail over their defiance. Then, with the door to his office ajar, so that he would be sure to be overheard, he began talking in a loud, clear voice to a companion about the penalties he intended to visit on the waiting princes if they once more refused to sign the agreement. He would have to throw them straight into jail, he said resignedly. "Of course, he

couldn't have done anything of the sort," my journalist acquaintance told me. "He didn't have the legal right to. But the princes didn't know that. When at last he opened the door wide and invited them in, they didn't argue at all. They just signed."

If this technique seems unsporting—and I can't think of a milder term for it—it must be remembered that Menon had very little time to complete his task. When the Indians and the Pakistanis asked the British to leave in August 1947, they had a great sense of triumph, but they were also non-plused by the prospect of shouldering so much responsibility so very soon. As the hour for the change-over approached and the theretofore execrated British Imperialist officials prepared to depart, they must have been grimly amused to observe how reluctant the new authorities were to see them go. The new authorities could have used a lot more time for preparation, especially when it came to getting the antagonistic princes into some sort of shape, but by pushing things through fast and ruthlessly they did actually manage to tie up most of the loose ends before the deadline. Neither India nor Pakistan dared allow any ruler to remain dangling in the air. For one thing, there were the utilities—the railways, the postal system, and so on—that had served the whole country, whether British India or princely state, and that any prince with an independent enclave could easily disrupt. For another, there was the fear that any such prince, without the protection of the British Crown, might be snapped up by somebody else—particularly if his state was in a frontier area. Above all, India was afraid that some of its

princes might try to play ball with Pakistan, and in several cases just that happened.

The most melodramatic, if not the most recalcitrant, of the recalcitrant Indian princes was the ruler of the border state of Jodhpur—the late Maharajah Sir Hanwant Singh. His Highness was a Hindu and his territory was assigned by the British to India, but His Highness was also a Rajput, which spelled trouble to begin with, for Rajputs are notoriously courageous, proud, and independent. In any case, he flatly refused to sign the Indian Instrument of Accession; perhaps hoping for better terms, he declared that he would far rather join up with Pakistan. In his book, Menon tells of the decisive interview, in New Delhi, that he and Lord Mountbatten had with His Highness (Mountbatten helpfully attended the more important showdowns of this sort), but in Bombay a friend of mine gave me a more detailed version of the encounter. For some weeks, it seems, the Maharajah had been ignoring the march of progress altogether. He spurned all invitations to discuss the abhorrent project. At last, Menon somehow persuaded him to stop off at New Delhi on his way home from a hunting expedition and see Mountbatten. The three men had a stormy conference, but after a time His Highness was momentarily won over and, on impulse, signed the paper. Immediately afterward, he experienced a revulsion of feeling—a rush of blood to the head—and, pulling a revolver out of his pocket, he leveled it at Menon. “The Maharajah raved,” my friend told me. “He said he was descended from the sun, and he’d

kill Menon rather than give in. Through it all, Mountbatten remained perfectly calm."

I said it seemed to me, meaning no disrespect, that Mountbatten was well able to afford calm, since the revolver was not pointed at him.

My informant nodded. "Well, yes," he said, "but at any rate Mountbatten kept his head in a crisis. He just said, 'Now, Your Highness, nobody can prevent your shooting V.P. if you're determined to do so, but I assure you that if you do, there will be someone else sitting in his chair tomorrow. It won't stop the integration of Jodhpur. It won't even postpone it.' This had a quieting effect on His Highness. He put the revolver away and there was no more trouble."

Enthusiastic though Menon was, he was not absolutely pitiless in his pursuit of the new order, and on rare occasions he took time out for regret over what was happening. For example, when the rulers of the princely lands that now constitute the state of Saurashtra took leave of their thrones, Menon presided over the ceremony and afterward fell into a period of deep despondency. Describing the ceremony in his book, he refers to "the poignant spectacle of the rulers parting with their proud heritage," and adds, "No ruler had thought even a month previously that he would have so soon to part with his State and rulership. Something which had been in their families for generations and which they had regarded as sacrosanct had disappeared as it were in the twinkling of an eye. Though all of them put up a bold front, the mental anguish they were going through was

writ large on their faces. . . . The scene here was to the last degree moving and will ever linger in my memory." More than once, in the course of the negotiations, some elderly prince begged for permission to abdicate just before the final day, with the understanding that his successor would then sign the Instrument, and thus spare him from going down in history as the man who surrendered. Such permission was always granted.

To the question of what is going to happen to India's princes now, the answer seems to be that almost anything can happen. Extinct as rulers, they are not yet extinct as a social class or, for the most part, as a plutocracy. There is pressure from inside the government, though, to make the privy purses subject to taxation after all, and while the financial doom I had read about has not yet come to pass, it may at any moment. In this respect, the plight of the princes is comparable to that of rich men in all nations undergoing socialization. But if the princes occupy a position roughly analogous to that of Britain's peers, there are some differences. The Parliament at New Delhi, for instance, has no House of Lords, so even the ghost of authority that the British aristocracy preserves is not shared by its Indian counterpart. Privilege, however, there still is—the privilege of the educated, the elite. A number of princes, as soon as they were deposed, volunteered for jobs in various Ministries, and in a country as woefully supplied as India with men capable of doing such work, they were welcomed, especially by the Ministry of External Affairs. Other princes turned to managing their estates—or, rather, they contin-

ued managing them somewhat as they had been doing all along, only now they had less to manage and far less help with the job. Still others simply accepted their retirement, cashed in as best they could on their jewels and other possessions, and went abroad. There have been so many reactions among those who signed the Instrument—so many princes each going his own way—that it is impossible to generalize.

It was up to each prince to look out for himself and save what he could from the wreckage when Independence Day overtook him, for there was no rigid rule governing the size of the privy purses. Menon's directions were to base his decision in each case on the size of that particular prince's income prior to his abdication and on his unavoidable responsibilities and commitments afterward. The Highnesses naturally pitched the estimates of their minimum requirements as high as possible, and, just as naturally, Menon beat them down as much as he could. Often he felt obliged to grant more than he would have if he had had adequate time to investigate and to argue. After obtaining a batch of signatures, he would go back to report to his superiors, nearly always expecting to be criticized for having run up too big a bill. But while he was sometimes rebuked for having shown undue generosity, on the whole his colleagues seem to have thought that he carried out a difficult task remarkably well.

One by-product of the integration of the princely states that is not likely to cause the authorities in New Delhi undue concern is the creeping paralysis it has inflicted on Bombay chitchat. The effect of this hasn't yet become glaring, but it is definitely beginning to show. The antics of certain Highnesses have always been a rich source of scandal, and now the flow seems bound, in time, to slow to a trickle. There is already an air of nostalgia about the maharajah stories one hears—a kind of before-the-war quality. The same sort of letdown must have occurred, in a slightly different way, when it was the British who curtailed the authority of India's princes. When a maharajah was deprived of his powers of life and death over his subjects, for example, his conduct inevitably became a little less picturesque. Not that the British interfered with Indian ways any more than they felt they had to; they had learned that meddling brought riots, and their orders were to leave native customs alone. Actually, only two rules were set up in defiance of Indian sensibilities: capital punishment was not to be meted out by maharajahs—this privilege



was reserved for the British overlords—and the practice of suttee, the self-immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres, was outlawed. When India gained independence, the new government retained the prohibition against suttee, to the deep disappointment of its more reactionary citizens; all those years there had been Hindus longing for the return of the good old days when a woman could burn herself up if she wanted to, and they were, to be precise, more than disappointed—they were outraged to learn that it was not to be. Now and then, even today, in some obscure Indian village, a woman newly widowed will let word be spread that she intends to throw herself into the flames, and an approving crowd will gather to watch. Scenes of violence have resulted when such spectacles are interrupted by policemen or soldiers sent to prevent the suicide.

The British also felt impelled to deprecate a few other customs of the maharajahs—or some maharajahs, at least—but they had no hard-and-fast directives. If a ruler behaved in a manner clearly calculated to disturb the peace and happiness of his people, or to offend the British, he was warned. If he did it again, he was warned again, and perhaps reprimanded. If he persisted in ignoring warnings and reprimands, he was retired in favor of his heir. I have heard tale after tale of the wrongdoings that used to bring on the ultimate punishment, and some of them were rather gaudy. There was one prince, for example, who collected all the pretty girls—and even all the passable ones—from his villages and kept them in his zenana. One of them got bored

and ran away, and when she was caught, he had her burned alive. He was deposed. A maharajah who sounds to me rather more attractive was one well known for saying anything that popped into his head, even to the exalted British. He held a reception one evening, and was standing in line with other dignitaries, shaking hands with the guests, when the wife of a high-ranking Anglo-Indian was presented to him. His Highness reached out, took a pinch of her dress sleeve, and rubbed it thoughtfully between thumb and forefinger. Then he turned to one of the dignitaries and said, in a cheerful, resounding voice, "Not real silk." It is pleasant to be able to report that he was not deposed.

Many of the tales in the Bombay treasury of gossip about maharajahs concern high living of one sort or another. I never saw any of the heroes of these; the maharajahs I saw, at banquets or on the beach, always turned out to be fairly quiet characters, but then I hadn't expected to find racy playboys in Bombay. Bombay has no night life comparable to, say, that of Port Said or prewar Shanghai, and from the playboy's point of view is a complete washout. Paris would be far more congenial to the gayer type, I reflected—Paris, or Biarritz, or Monte Carlo. India has a system of local option governing the sale of alcoholic beverages, and Bombay is almost totally dry; there are no bars, no liquor is served in hotels or restaurants, and the citizen who wants to buy a bottle must first produce a doctor's statement that he needs alcohol for his health and then secure a municipal permit. (A foreigner needs a permit, too, but he doesn't have to produce any medical evidence.) Clearly, Bombay is no para-

dise for any prince who likes his worldly pleasures—or, if it comes to that, for any commoner of similar tastes. Maharajahs so inclined do better to go somewhere else or stay at home, provided that home is a part of the country where the law doesn't prohibit alcohol.

Most Highnesses who stay at home have begun to economize wherever they can. It is impossible for them to get rid of their domestic responsibilities, nor would they want to; the lives of Indians are shored up and made secure by cousins and uncles and aunts and old servants and the old servants' cousins and uncles and aunts. But outlying buildings on their estates can be closed, valuables can be sold, and an end can be put to the formerly endless business of hospitality. Today, most tourists who want to travel through India find that they have to go about it much as they would go about traveling through other countries—putting up at hotels or official resthouses, and paying their own way. Some of the hotels, to be sure, are converted palaces run for profit by their princely owners, but this fact certainly makes the blow no less bitter to the old house-party crowd. I heard a good deal of indignant comment on one maharajah, enterprising but not typical, who, while showing visitors around his palace, displays his family jewels and, with a magnanimous air, urges the ladies to take their choice. To those unwary or naïve enough to do so, he later sends a bill. His charges are not unreasonable—very little more than those made by shops that offer similar articles for sale. I've never met this Highness, but my sympathies are with him, vaguely.



# Tiger Shoot





O f the five hundred and fifty-five hereditary princes in India who were dethroned, the one I've come to know best is His Highness the Maharao Rajah of Bundi, since I have twice been a guest at his palace—the first time to attend a marathon house party he threw to celebrate his thirty-seventh birthday, and the second for a more restful visit. Bundi, where His Highness still has fifty thousand acres of his own under cultivation, covers an area of something like twenty-two hundred square miles, and used to be one of the princely states in the Rajputana, or Rajasthan, Agency, now part of the new State of Rajasthan, bordering on West Pakistan; about three hundred thousand people make up its population, and twenty-one thousand of them live in the city of Bundi, the ancient capital of the state. The terrain varies, but the wilds of Bundi are a fair example of what big-game hunters still call “typical Rajput country,” meaning ranges of steep, thorn-covered hills rising above jungle-covered flats. It is also tiger country.

His Highness's standing is summed up more or less adequately in the 1956–57 edition of *Who's Who in India*,

which lists him in straightforward fashion as Colonel H. H. Harendra Shiro-mani Deo Sar Buland Rai Maharajah Dhiraj Maharao Rajah Bahadur Singhji Bahadur, M.C., A.D.C., Maharao Rajah of Bundi. "A lot of those titles refer to heaven and glory and so on," he explained with some embarrassment when I asked him what it all meant. "Simply tradition." But part of it, he admitted, has more realistic significance. He won the Military Cross in Burma during the war, and he is now aide-de-camp to the President of India. (For a while, after the war, he was honorary aide-de-camp to King George VI.) He has been married for twenty years and has two nearly grown-up children, plus a lot of other responsibilities that he takes seriously, but he still seems like a very young man, almost boyish—an observation that would probably offend him slightly. Perhaps the youthful impression he conveys can be traced to the fact that, for all the dignity of his position, His Highness has gaiety. Not that it is immediately apparent, for he has a generally reserved manner. Mayo College, at Ajmer, where he was educated, was staffed by British masters, and they may have taught him to repress his spirits because a certain amount of stuffiness was considered the right thing for a ruler, or he may have developed self-control on his own, in order to be as much like his forefathers as possible. To judge by what I have read of these gentlemen, gaiety was not one of their outstanding characteristics. Courage, yes; toughness and pride and honor, certainly, and in large quantity; but if they had a sense of either humor or gaiety, I have never heard of it.



The palace currently occupied by His Highness is a mile or so outside the city of Bundi, near Phoolsagar, or the Lake of Flowers, for which it is named. It was built just after the war, when its owner returned from the Burma campaign and decided that he wanted quarters more practical than his antiquated ancestral palace, which still clings to the side of a cliff in the city. His Highness's birthday party was an elaborate affair lasting six or seven days—I never could figure out just when it was officially supposed to end—and I was invited to it even though I had never laid eyes on him in my life. Three other women, also invited guests, with whom I went up to Bundi by overnight train from Bombay, had never met him, either, and if we all looked slightly perplexed and ill at ease on the train, we had reason, for we were being imported, en masse, to help fill out the crowd. The three women with me on this collective blind date were Ruth, who is English and an old friend of mine, and who lives in Bombay; Indira, another old friend, who is Indian and also lives in Bombay; and Betty, a Scot, whom I'd never seen before. The pertinent thing we four had in common was an acquaintanceship with Graham, an Australian free-lance photographer who travels around India taking pictures on order—of factories and parties and mountains and wildlife. It was he who, representing the Maharao Rajah of Bundi, had organized our little group. It had all been a very last-minute arrangement. One morning only a couple of days before, he had rung up Ruth's house, where I was staying during a brief visit to Bombay. Since Ruth was out at the time, I took the call, and Graham asked if she

and I would like to go to a prince's birthday party, complete with tiger-shooting, in Rajputana. He said he was sure we'd have a good time, and suggested that we try to think of some other women who might like to go along. "It's really going to be something," he continued, "because it just so happens that His Highness's birthday coincides with Holi. You know about Holi, of course—the national holiday when everybody goes around dousing everybody else with colored powder and pink water, and having a wonderful time? It's a fertility rite, I believe, but we needn't go into that. At any rate, His Highness throws this big party every year at his palace near Bundi, a most beautiful town. I go there whenever I get the chance, whether I've got a job to do or not. There'll be maharajahs all over the place," he added.

I said that I'd love to go, and that I imagined Ruth would, too, but that I was somewhat puzzled by the setup. "Does this Maharajah leave the guest list to you?" I asked. "I mean, after all, it's his party, and you wouldn't expect him to want a lot of strangers around. I do want to go, you understand, but it does seem odd."

Graham assured me that it wasn't at all odd, really. "His Highness invites a lot of his friends and relatives, of course," he said. "But it's a big affair, and he's always faced with the problem of having too many men and not enough women. That's why I'm not supposed to ask the husbands of any of the ladies I invite. You see, some maharajahs' wives are in purdah and don't go to parties, and he's worried about the photographs he wants me to take. The tiger shoot should

be easy enough, but how can I make a nice picture of the birthday dinner if there's nothing but a lot of men in black coats sitting around the table? We need women to dress the party up, so he's asked me to find some. It's happened before. His Highness leaves it to me because I go back and forth so much. He wants these big turnouts to *look* right. He's like that."

At the time, this made sense in a cock-eyed way—the way many things seem to during a hot spell in Bombay, even though they might seem very strange in, say, New York, whatever the weather. When Ruth came home, I told her about the invitation, and after calling her husband at his office she said she thought she'd go, too. But then, when we had let Graham know that he could count on us, we fell to wondering why *we* should have been picked out. Surely, if one wants to dress up a table with women for a photograph, the thing to do is to look around for pretty young things. I wish to cast no aspersions on Ruth's beauty or mine; I am sure we are a credit to our sex and our husbands. But the fact remains that Ruth has three grown-up children and that I, too, have a family, and while we are doubtless perfectly charming, we simply are not glamour-girl material. As for Indira, although she always looks lovely, she doesn't set out to be a siren, either. (By the time we arrived at Bundi, she was already pining for her husband and children, from whom she had been separated for only eighteen hours.) The story was the same when we met Betty on the train—pert and piquant and all that, but she never-

theless turned out to be the mother of a boy in boarding school.

After the four of us had settled ourselves in connecting compartments of a sleeping car that would take us to Kotah, the nearest station to Bundi, and the train had begun hooting its way through the outskirts of Bombay, Graham dropped in for a cup of tea. He was slightly downcast because a young girl—"as pretty as a fashion model"—who was to have joined us had backed out just that morning; it seemed that her boy friend had taken an obstructive attitude. "Oh, well, Graham," Indira said, trying to cheer him up, "there'll be at least two pretty girls on hand. Norma and Jacqueline are coming, aren't they?"

Graham said yes, Norma and Jacqueline were coming. "Tomorrow morning, by plane," he went on. "Mac's piloting, and Flo's coming along, as well. It's not His Highness's plane—not *our* Highness's, that is—but a Navion belonging to the Nawab of Bhopal. Mac flies for him, too. Bhopal won't be at the party, but he's letting us use his plane for the duration."

None of these names meant anything to me, so I just sat and sipped tea and listened, trying to catch up. But Ruth, who I was sure was just as lost as I was, said, "Well, I'm certainly glad to hear that. I always hate a birthday party without at least one plane." Graham replied gravely that, of course, there'd be other planes there, too.

Late the next morning, we arrived at Kotah, a fairly large and up-to-date town, set in the same kind of flat-lying country, with sharp, mesalike uplands in the distance, that I had been watching from my compartment window for some hours. At the station, we were met by a correct, solemn young man in India's modern warm-weather costume—light trousers and a bush shirt. Graham hailed him in the manner of an old friend. "This is Shambhu Nath, one of His Highness's A.D.C.s," he explained to us. "His Highness has another A.D.C. named Shambhu Singh, so I call them Tweedledum and Tweedledee." Shambhu Nath smiled obligingly, and led us off to a station wagon and a small truck that were guarded by two smartly dressed drivers wearing orange turbans—the predominant color of the Bundhi flag. Our bags were loaded onto the truck, we clambered into the station wagon, and the caravan started off for Bundhi. Once we were out in the country, we encountered very little traffic but an increasingly large number of peacocks. Peacocks are sacred in Rajputana. Since nobody would think of molesting them, they wander at will, like

cows, which are similarly privileged. They are quite a hazard to drivers, for they are neither agile nor quick off the mark, and it never occurs to them to get out of the way until what seems to be just a bit after the last possible instant; sometimes one will take off straight at an approaching car and—as there is rather a lot of peacock, especially when it is on the wing—you feel as if you are heading right into the middle of a phoenix or a dragon. Still, I never saw one of the birds actually get hit.

We crossed what looked to me like an absentee river, though Graham remarked that he could not recall a time when it had been so full of water. He and Shambhu agreed that it had been a very good year for the crops. Soon we passed a deserted customs post, and Graham announced that we were in Bundi. We were riding, as we had been for some time, along the flat floor of a wide valley enclosed by ranges of hills that looked like walls. The road was paved and modern, stretching like a gray ribbon over tan ground that was strewn with chips of slaty rock. Although there was vegetation all about us, including an abundance of tall neem and mango trees, the valley reminded me of desert country, for most of it was covered with thorny and gnarled bushes so uniformly brown and leafless I thought they must be dead. (In New England, they would have been.) According to Shambhu, though, I was completely wrong. That brown scrub, he said, was as strongly alive as the barley crops we saw rising green above an occasional irrigated patch of land; indeed, it was more alive—or at least tougher, for it had to rely entirely on its own resources to survive. I contemplated

the bare, leafless, stubborn vegetation for some miles before I woke up to the fact that we were riding through a jungle. Like most Westerners, I have always thought of a jungle as a welter of tangled, creeping plants and year-round juicy greenness, and it is hard for me to remember that in India during the dry season (things are very different when the rains come) a jungle is a curiously tidy place, with a clean and comparatively barren floor, and enough space between the trees to reveal quite a bit of the interior. You can even see some of the denizens of an Indian jungle, and they can see you. As we rolled along, several langur monkeys lolloped out toward the road to examine us more closely.

The city of Bundi cuddles in a narrow cleft between two spurs of a mountain, some of it pouring out and downward in a jumble of scattered houses, and some of it climbing steeply part way up one of the spurs and dying off abruptly against a wall of rock; when I first got a glimpse of it, I was reminded of Naples or one of those hillside towns in Greece. Our driver detoured around the center of the city and took a well-paved road that ran along the side of the unpopulated spur, then up over the crest and down the other side into a U-shaped valley where it was hemmed in by jungle, except for a stretch that skirted a lake. "That's Phoolsagar Lake, and Phoolsagar Palace is just up ahead of us," Graham said. "Shambhu, could we stop the car on that rise, so the ladies can get a good look at it?" Shambhu spoke to the driver, and the station wagon halted. Lying between two hills, the palace and its sprawling grounds were surrounded by a wall, in which a gatehouse, manned by a couple of

guards, was the only visible opening. The palace itself, standing at the end of a canal, was entirely, and dazzlingly, white. Despite the walls and the guards, it did not remind me of a fortress, as some Indian palaces do; instead, it had a relaxed and peaceful beauty, and it made me think of knights in armor and tournaments and fluttering pennons.

"His Highness built that palace," Graham said. "There was a little shooting box here before, I believe. As you can see, he changed it all over. Practically the whole thing is new. He started work on it— Well, when did he start, Shambhu?"

"After the accession—after he came back from military service in Burma. Around 1946, I think it was," Shambhu said.

Driving past the gatehouse, we approached the palace by a driveway running parallel to an oblong lawn that was bounded on two sides by covered walks, like cloisters. Their walls were painted a cool green, and nearby was a pool fed by a stream of gently splashing water, brought in underground, Graham said, from the canal beyond. Rising out of the pool, which was framed by ranks of tall red and yellow cannas, was a piece of white stone statuary, which some kingfishers were using as a roost when they weren't diving for fish. We exclaimed in admiration, and Shambhu Nath smiled a little absently, as if he had often heard such cries before, which, indeed, he had. He may first have heard them in 1949, when a squad of M-G-M people spent ten days at Phoolsagar Palace, taking shots for the picture



"Kim." And since then, of course, there have been many guests, many house parties.

At the entrance to the palace, we four women got out and, leaving Graham to see to the unloading of his photographic gear, followed Shambhu along corridors and around corners until at last we reached a high-ceilinged, shuttered, cool drawing room, where we perched on the edges of chairs and waited with all the trepidation of girls on their first day at boarding school. The room itself, I think, was mainly what got us down. It was hardly what one would call cozy. There was a profusion of mirrors, vases of flowers, crystal chandeliers—all that sort of thing—as well as a life-size portrait of His Highness in princely regalia and haughty mood. Most overwhelming, though, were the photographs—a formidable array of them, on every table and mantel. Splendidly framed in silver and facing every which way, they were all of British royalty, and all were autographed, save for one in which little Prince Charles was shown peering into a pram at Princess Anne.

A door opened, and there, unmistakably, was His Highness. We all stood up, with a wilted rustle of skirts that had traveled a long way, as he entered the room. Slender and lithe, handling himself like a track or tennis champion, he looked far younger than the thirty-seven he was about to become, but he was in full command of the situation. Smiling slightly as Graham, who had come along just in time, presented us, one by one, he was polite yet withdrawn as he acknowledged the introductions. I felt that although he looked at each of us in turn, we didn't really register on

his vision—that while he was perfectly willing to be amiable, it would be up to us to take the initiative. After I got to know him better, I realized that this impression was not entirely accurate—or, rather, that it was an oversimplification. His Highness did care a lot about his birthday party and wanted to do his best to make it a success; it was just that he had come to wear a reserved manner as a sort of armor, which he found difficult to throw off at a moment's notice.

In any case, the armor proved impenetrable for the time being. Indira made the first stab at it by asking, "Which day is your birthday? Tomorrow?"

"My Indian birthday has already taken place," His Highness said courteously. "My Western-style one is the day after tomorrow."

"The same day as Holi," Indira said.

"The same day," His Highness agreed. "Please sit down, everybody."

We sat. A servant brought orange juice and Coca-Cola. Conversation did not sparkle, exactly. It reminded me of the first half of so many parties in London—and of some in New York, too. "How beautifully cool it is in here," Ruth said, and we all chimed in to say that it was, indeed, beautifully cool, and then His Highness explained that opening the windows at night and closing them in the daytime was what did the trick, and we all nodded in wonder at such an ingenious procedure. A couple of men appeared in the doorway, and Shambhu Nath tiptoed over and began whispering to them, now and then glancing in our direction.

It developed that they were allocating sleeping quarters, and after we had finished our drinks, we were led away to them. Ruth and I were separated from Indira and Betty and escorted by a servant down a corridor, past the great snarling head of a tiger and the more peaceful visage of some antlered animal, then up a flight of stairs and along a veranda to a suite with the name "Auchinleck" painted over the door. On the wall outside hung a Rajput painting of a highly decorated elephant carrying a black-mustached, black-whiskered king and an attendant or two in a bejeweled howdah. The king, I was later informed, was His Highness's grandfather—His late *late* Highness, the A.D.C.s called him, to distinguish him from His Highness's father.

Ruth's husband had insisted that she take along their family servant Kanji, on the theory that he would come in handy at the palace, since the local servants would be so busy with the party. Kanji had ridden from Kotah to the palace in the cab of the truck, and now we found him waiting for us in Auchinleck. Ordinarily a pleasant, smiling young man, he looked scared stiff. He appeared to me to be very neat in white shirt and trousers, but to Ruth's eyes he clearly lacked something. "Perhaps we should have bought him a turban," she said thoughtfully. "Well, it's too late now. Kanji, would you take our dresses down and press them, please? We'll be wanting a couple of them for dinner."

Kanji loaded up his arms with dresses, then hovered uncertainly at the door. Ruth interpreted his hesitation without difficulty. "Well, go and ask where the ironing board is, for heaven's sake," she said.

With a great sigh, Kanji went out. A few hours later, we found the dresses, still unpressed, back in our wardrobe, and Kanji looking chastened and miserable. All the available ironing boards were in constant use by the palace servants, he said, and they wouldn't let him get near one. Ruth declared that since he had failed us, we would have to beg the palace people to do our pressing. This threat of humiliation at once stirred Kanji to more positive action; he disappeared, and returned presently with an ironing board that he had stolen from the palace laundry, and thereafter kept it in our quarters. Throughout our stay, he was a very unhappy boy. Our evening drinks, for instance, were brought in not by Kanji but by a lofty, orange-turbaned bearer, with the bareheaded Kanji following him as as abject appendage. I think Ruth was right; a turban would have helped.

Before lunch that first day, Ruth and I examined our accommodations. They were certainly ample—a big bedroom, a big dressing room, a big bathroom—but even so, we found, they constituted only half the suite. The other half, separated from ours by a locked door, turned out to be occupied by Graham, who invited us to come around and look over his domain as well. Ruth is keen about housekeeping and has decided opinions on the subject; our setup seemed fine to me, and I thought it did to her, too, until we got to Graham's. Then, looking around his living room, she said, "You can tell no woman had a hand in all this." On a desk was a lamp whose base was a naked lady made of some kind of metal, and on a glass-topped table lay another naked lady,

of marble. I thought that these were what she was talking about, but she said she didn't mean that kind of thing, exactly; it was more a matter of little signs like not enough hangers, and lamps that, regardless of their design, were inconveniently placed. "I don't imagine Her Highness can have had much to do with it," she added. "What do you think, Graham?"

"Oh, she probably wouldn't have," Graham replied. "After all, she's in purdah. As a matter of fact, I doubt if she would have anyway. This palace isn't very big—only about thirty-five bedrooms—and building it was His Highness's idea. He wanted something more manageable than the Old Palace, where he grew up. So I expect he planned it all. He likes doing that sort of thing."

"Oughtn't we to suggest calling on Her Highness?" Ruth asked. "Or wouldn't that be correct?"

Graham was vague. He said he believed that female visitors did sometimes meet her, but he wasn't sure; he thought it would be best just to feel our way along.

Ruth asked about mealtimes. "Lunch will be pretty soon now," Graham said, "and for dinner the usual thing is to gather at about nine and have a few drinks. Then dinner is served when His Highness feels like ordering it—sometimes in an hour, but it might be three hours or more. Depends on how amusingly the evening goes."

This didn't startle us, because in Bombay late dinners are the rule, too; as in Spain, people do their serious eating well on toward midnight, when it's cooler. In the end, because the arrangements were so flexible, and because even if there

had been a dinner gong we probably wouldn't have been able to hear it, unless a servant came walking around with it like a ship's steward, we learned to wait until we were summoned for the session of preliminary evening drinks.

That first afternoon, Shambhu Nath called for us at lunch time, and we went down in his wake. He led us to a drawing room we hadn't seen before—less formal and smaller than the mirrored salon we had met our host in. Here the photographs were all of His Highness's relatives—maharajahs with brides, maharajahs with children, and maharajahs just sitting for their portraits. But I did not notice these details immediately, because the room was full of live maharajahs and I was being introduced to them—all the way around a wide circle. There were the Maharajah of Bikaner and the Maharajah of Rewa, referred to, respectively, by our host as "Cousin Bikaner" and "Cousin Rewa." There were various relatives of the Maharajah of Jodhpur, but His Highness himself was not present, being only a small child. These names were comparatively easy for me, because they were familiar in a geographical sense, but others I never did get straightened out, especially when they belonged to princelings who didn't stay the whole course.

Again, conversation did not sparkle—or at least it didn't

where we women sat, sipping sherry. The men fared better. In little knots—in corners, or on settees, or in chairs arranged in groups—they conversed with something approaching genuine enthusiasm, mainly, I gathered, about firearms. Most of the talk was in English, as it usually is among educated Indians of these princes' generation. Now and then, somebody would send a servant out to fetch a rifle, and when the weapon appeared, it would be passed from hand to hand. But among us women silence prevailed. It wasn't that we didn't try; we did. It wasn't that we were too lofty to talk about shooting, either; the men just didn't seem to expect us to contribute. They didn't need us; they were quite happy by themselves. But there were a few exceptions, who saw to it that we were not neglected completely. Here and there, a male sat with a woman on each side of him, and for a while the Maharajah of Bikaner, a good-looking young man with a mustache and prominent brown eyes, actually exchanged remarks with me.

To start the ball rolling, I asked, "Did you drive down from Bikaner?"

He replied that he had, and went on to tell me how many hours his party had been on the road, and where the road was good and where it was bad. (Oh, yes, it was *just* like an English party, I reflected.) He said that this was the first time he had seen this new palace, and that he liked it very much.

"I once knew a woman who had visited your palace in Bikaner, as your father's guest," I said. "I remember she thought him a remarkable man."



"That was my grandfather, I expect," said His Highness. "I mean, if she was there quite a while ago, because my father didn't reign very long before he died. *There's* my grandfather," he added, pointing to one of the photographs—of a maharajah encrusted with honorary orders.

Betty leaned over from a faraway chair and said, "Your Highness, I've heard such a lot about your father."

"My father, or my grandfather?" His Highness began. "My father didn't reign very—"

There was a stir at the door, caused by the arrival of the four guests who had flown from Bombay—Mac, a youthful former pilot with the Royal Air Force; Florence, an Englishwoman visiting in India; and Norma and Jacqueline, the two attractive young girls that Indira had spoken of. Well, I thought, now, perhaps, the princes will sit up and take notice, and the party will jell. But in this I was pretty much mistaken, although when Norma settled down next to His Highness of Bikaner, he did show a certain mild reaction—rather as if someone had just brought in a new and improved rifle. Norma said that she was interested in flying and was hoping to get her pilot's license soon, but when His Highness asked her, with apparently genuine interest, how many flying hours she'd had, she didn't seem to know or care, and the subject was dropped. Norma asked His Highness if he had driven down from Bikaner, and he replied that he had, and described the condition of the roads, and she said she had heard so much about his father, who must have been a wonderful old man.

"That was probably my grandfather," said His Highness.

I stopped a passing waiter and asked for another sherry. His Highness asked for Coca-Cola, and explained that he never drank alcohol. Coca-Cola was his vice, he said, smiling faintly. Betty, still doing her best from her remote outpost, said they did keep the room wonderfully cool, didn't they?

This time it was Norma who changed the subject, with an abrupt mention of the imperial sand grouse of Bikaner. She couldn't have done better, for this is a unique bird, well known to sportsmen, and His Highness plunged happily into a discussion of it, like one finding himself home at last after a brief but perilous journey. I edged away and talked for a while with Florence, who told me that, according to Mac, we were going on a tiger shoot next day. I was glad to hear of at least one item on the agenda, because I was beginning to feel baffled about what to expect next. Later, I discovered that when in doubt consult an A.D.C., but I hadn't yet realized this, and anyway the A.D.C.s—three in all—were sadly harried young men. When they weren't busy on some major project, such as arranging for transportation to and from shoots or supervising preparations for a dance, they offered cigarettes around and supplied lights. I assumed that they must also be busy in the kitchen now and then, placating the cooks when His Highness put off a meal for several hours, but in this I was dead wrong; the palace cooks, I was given to understand after a day or two, were used to an uncertain schedule. But that first afternoon I watched the time slip by, and I worried. The poor cooks, I thought—or, for that matter, His poor

Highness, if they had happened to make a soufflé. Yet there was our host, casually hefting firearms and discussing their merits with five or six male guests, as if nothing in the world mattered but trigger guards and firing pins.

Ultimately, however, the signal was given, and we trooped into the dining room, where a buffet lunch was spread out on a long table—Indian food at one end and English at the other. As so often happens in India, the Europeans went for the Indian food, while the Indians gathered about the European dishes. Guests at buffets generally have a way of shaking down socially, and the guests at this lunch were no exception. I drew for lunch companions three members of the Jodhpur contingent—a tall, vigorous-looking old man named Ratan Singh, and his two sons, Lakshman Singh and Mohan Singh. They talked, with an enthusiasm that verged on the poetic, about tiger-shooting, and now and then I made what I hoped was an appropriate remark. I was momentarily distracted from the conversation when I caught our host's eye as he was crossing the room, and for an instant I thought I detected in that grave, handsome countenance a trace of feeling, a spark of mirth. But no, I decided; it could not be. I turned back to Mohan Singh, who was observing that a tiger has very little sense of smell. "No! Really?" I said.

I ndira wanted to see the Old Palace—she had been hearing about its wall paintings for years, she said—so after lunch she buttonholed Graham and asked him if he could fix up a sight-seeing tour for our group. He said that he would if he could get a car, but that he wanted to lie down for a while first. We made a date to meet him at three-thirty in the smaller drawing room, but when Indira and I turned up, he was not there. A minute or two later, His Highness of Bikaner rambled in, and we all talked, drowsily, of various things. “If I’d known all you ladies were going to be here, I’d have brought my wife,” said His Highness. “She might have refused to come, though, because one of our children is just getting over the measles.”

“Her Highness of Bundi is in purdah, isn’t she?” Indira asked.

Bikaner nodded, and Indira looked perturbed. A very progressive woman who studied in England and married out of her caste, she feels strongly about such matters. I braced myself for her next remark, which I felt would almost surely be tactless, and was relieved when Graham

came in just in time to forestall it. "I'm sorry, but I fell asleep," he said. "And now, I'm afraid it's too late for the Old Palace. I really *am* sorry, but never mind—we'll go tomorrow."

"There's a shoot tomorrow," Indira told him.

"Well, then, the next day," Graham said indifferently.

"They're all thinking about nothing but tigers around here," Indira said to me as we walked toward her apartment. "They couldn't care less about paintings." She and Betty had each been assigned a room on the ground floor, overlooking the pool, and for a while we lounged on the veranda in front of her quarters, watching the kingfishers make their dives into the pool and talking about lizards, which, she confessed, terrified her. I remarked that this must be an awkward phobia to have in India. "It is," she said. "I think it's the way lizards look at you. They see right *into* you. Well, I think I'll ring for tea—want some?—and then have a rest before dinner." I decided against tea and started toward my staircase, but had taken only a few steps when a piercing scream stopped me in my tracks. Indira, drawing her window curtains, had found herself staring into the eyes of an enormous lizard sprawled on the sill.

Ruth was reading on her bed when I got back to our rooms, and I lay down on mine, planning to read, too. Instead, we talked. It was very quiet in Auchinleck, and outside as well. Whatever the maharajahs were up to, it had taken them elsewhere. Ruth guessed that they were checking up on the kills.

"What do you mean, 'kills'?" I asked. "Have they been shooting today?"

"No," Ruth said. "But His Highness's wardens have tethered buffaloes in various places around the countryside in the hope that tigers will come and kill them. In other places they've tethered goats. Goats are for panthers, not tigers. You have to go out and check up on all these tethered baits every now and then, to see what's what and where your tiger is. Or your panther."

"Where on earth did you learn all this?" I asked. "You didn't know a thing about tigers this morning."

Ruth said that she'd just kept her ears open at lunch.

"Well," I said, "how do the tigers find these buffaloes—by their sense of smell?" Ruth looked blank, and said she supposed so. "Impossible," I said. "I happen to know that a tiger has practically no sense of smell. I kept my ears open at lunch, too. Furthermore, it's the only jungle animal of which that's true. But tigers do have very keen hearing. How are we expected to dress tonight, do you think—formal or informal?"

"Dinner's black tie, Graham told me," Ruth said.

At nine o'clock, an A.D.C. came to fetch Graham and us, and following in the emissary's footsteps like Wenceslas's page, the three of us trooped downstairs together to the grand drawing room—the one with all the British royalty. It looked very elegant by chandelier light, and so did everyone in it. The princes and their attendants wore the national dress of India—high-collared black coats and white trousers—as did several non-Indian guests, including

a Belgian diplomat named Louis, who had flown his plane from Delhi that afternoon. We all gazed admiringly at an Indian girl who had come with him and was wearing a simple, dramatic yellow-and-black sari. She looked absolutely marvelous.

“Her name’s Manjeed,” Graham whispered. “She’s a Sikh.”

A Sikh? But in my mind Sikhs were great burly men who never went to barbers; somehow I had never stopped to realize that there must be Sikh women. Apparently, Ruth had shared my blind spot. “I miss the beard,” she said.

I managed all right at dinner. Definitely, things were beginning to look up. My companions on either side were comparative chatterboxes, and I was able to discuss, in an informed, if limited, way, not only tigers and panthers but game birds—imperial sand grouse, plus duck-shooting at my sister's place in the Adirondacks. However, the bulk of the talk was tigers, tigers, all the way. I had the happy idea of asking the expert on my left about the method employed in Rajasthan for locating tigers. He told me that His Highness maintained a patrol of game wardens who reported every day on what tiger was where, and that on special occasions like this they set out buffaloes and checked up on them periodically. Usually, after killing a buffalo, the tiger eats its fill, goes to sleep nearby, and then returns later for another meal. While hunters wait near the corpse, beaters spread out through the jungle. At the appointed time, the beaters wake the tiger by making a lot of noise, and drive it along past the guns.

I asked if any kills had been reported yet, and my left-



hand expert shook his head. "Then nobody actually knows where we're going tomorrow?" I persisted.

"I believe that in this case His Highness does know," the expert on my right volunteered confidently. "He has his eye on one particular tiger about forty miles from here. His wardens know practically every step that tiger takes. It's in good territory for a shoot—near a new airstrip His Highness has constructed, and also accessible by road."

This was good going, I thought, and in an emergency I could always return to the Adirondacks for inspiration, and tell about the deer drives there. As things turned out, though, I was able to save the deer drives for future use, because we all went to bed early, so as to be fresh for whatever the morning might hold in store. Ruth and I had a little chat with Graham in his suite before turning in. Graham goes to most of the social functions in Bombay and takes photographs for the local papers—innumerable shots of guests shaking hands with dignitaries in reception lines at the Taj Mahal Hotel; biting firmly into chicken Tandoori at banquets; standing around, all dressed up, with glasses of lemonade (Bombay is dry), as if they loved lemonade—and whenever Ruth and I run into him, we ordinarily gossip about people in that city. Tonight, however, things were rather different.

"You haven't met His Highness's daughter—the Princess Kitten," Graham said. "Too bad she's away right now. She loves shooting. Shot her first tiger last year. It may not have been very big—I haven't the figures on it—but after all she

was only fourteen at the time, and she got it with a single shot. Pretty good, that."

We agreed, like the experts we were, that getting a tiger with one shot was not bad for a girl of fourteen. After a pause, I said, "His Highness of Rewa has shot hundreds of tigers in his time. I believe he's lost count."

"The one we're going after tomorrow may be a man-eater," Ruth said. "Man-eaters help you tot up more points."

"Tigers walk miles in a single night," I said. "Not like lions. Lions are lazy and don't mind being kept in zoos."

"Tigers can jump jolly high when they have to," Ruth said. "His Highness of Bikaner was sitting in a tree *machan* once and—" She stifled a yawn, and with that we said good night to Graham and went to bed.

I n Bombay, crows usually woke me in the morning. In Bundi, it was doves. That first morning in Phoolsagar Palace, Ruth and I sat in bed listening to their cooings, drinking tea, and watching the occasional orange turban of a bearer pass below a window that looked out on the veranda. But not for long. Since we weren't sure when the shoot would begin, we soon got up, dressed hurriedly, and went downstairs to reconnoiter.

Standing beside the pool, Ruth gazed pensively at the water and said, "His Highness asked me to jump in last night."

"He did?" I said, startled. "Good Lord, why? And which Highness?"

"Bundi himself," Ruth replied. "He just said rather wistfully that it would be nice if I did. He said that somebody always jumps into the pool sooner or later."

After a while, Indira joined us, and then an A.D.C. came along and shifted us to a courtyard outside the big drawing room—a pleasant place, with a terrace, a lawn, and a fountain. Some of the men, dressed in khaki or jungle

green, had already gathered there, keyed up and eager to be off. I asked Lakshman Singh, one of the two brothers from Jodhpur, "Has the tiger killed?"

"Not yet, as far as we know," he replied. "But he's nearby."

Betty had now found her way to the courtyard, and she asked an A.D.C. the same question. He said we were waiting for Mac, who had got up early to fly over the region chosen for the shoot and see for himself. His Highness was suspending operations pending Mac's report. We might go at any minute or we might not go until after lunch. It all depended on whether the tiger had killed. So, in a mood of lazy suspense, we just sat in easy chairs on the terrace, waiting for Mac. Shambhu Nath came around with a notebook and asked if any of us wanted to go to the shoot by plane. Ruth said she'd rather go by car, but I said I'd like very much to fly. Shambhu jotted that down in his notebook and moved on, but before long he came back and told me I couldn't fly, after all; there was no space left in the planes. I accepted my lot philosophically; I was not so accustomed to flying to tiger hunts that reaching them by any other means was out of the question. Now we were back at the previous afternoon's game of tossing conversational topics to the gentlemen and having them shot down like clay pigeons. Bikaner, however, was an exception. I eavesdropped while he told Ruth about a tiger he had shot the year before. "There he was, coming right at me," His Highness was saying. "I picked up my gun—"

Plainly doing her best, Ruth interrupted to ask, "What kind of gun?"

His Highness checked himself. "Tiger-shooting gun," he said. "Well, I picked it up—"

Word suddenly went around that we were about to leave. The A.D.C.s stopped lighting cigarettes and raced this way and that. With the rest of the ground travelers, Ruth and I were shepherded to the front entrance of the palace, where we filed into some cars that were waiting there. I landed in the back seat of a station wagon, next to Mohan Singh and right behind Ruth; Shambhu Nath was sitting up front, next to the driver. We set off in the conventional manner, which is to say along the road, but after a while the driver, at a word from Shambhu Nath, made a right-angle turn and headed directly into the trackless jungle. At first, I thought we were probably just taking a short detour around a washout or something. I soon saw, however, that we weren't circling at all but plunging straight ahead—on and on, jogging and bouncing over the rocky jungle floor, with the other cars strung out behind. I leaned forward and whispered to Ruth, "What's up?"

Ruth whispered back, "This is Shambhu Nath's own part of the country, and he knows a short cut. Routine procedure, apparently."

Mentally, I relaxed. Physically, relaxation was impossible. Sometimes, as we lurched along, I was thrown into Mohan Singh's lap, and sometimes he was thrown into mine. For a while, we followed a dry river bed that seemed to be mostly boulders. As the car hurdled one of them, Ruth toppled right out of her seat.

"Oh, sorry!" Shambhu said. "But we're almost there—nearly at the airstrip."

Soon, we rolled up out of the river bed and reached some faint wheel tracks, and before long, sure enough, there was the airstrip ahead of us. The planes had not yet arrived; indeed, according to Shambhu Nath, who was very informative when he had time, they had not yet taken off from the palace airport. Their passengers were having lunch first. In anticipation of their arrival, however, a large crowd of countrypeople—beaters, with their wives and children—had assembled at the airstrip, and in the meanwhile they were willing to take some interest in us. The men wore brilliant-colored turbans and ragged shorts or dhotis, the women full skirts and blouses—they reminded me of Navajo women—and the children nothing very much at all. We stared back at them, and both sides grinned in a friendly manner. After a long conversation between sundry arbiters of our fate, it was decided that we need not wait there for the others. I found myself paired off with Lakshman Singh, who led the way to the bank of a big river—a genuine one, with water in it—which he identified as the Chambal. As we walked toward it, he told me about a very close

call His late Highness of Jodhpur once had while shooting tigers in Udaipur.

"By the way, has our tiger killed yet?" I asked.

"Yes, he has killed," said Lakshman Singh. So that, at least, was settled.

We reached a nice cool cave on the riverbank, and an attendant spread a rug on a flat rock in the entrance. I sat down on it and began to mop my face. A moment later, the attendant said something in the vernacular to Lakshman Singh, who, in turn, said to me, "Come on." In unquestioning obedience, I rose. The attendant picked up the rug, and we went on along the riverbank. "Bees," said Lakshman Singh. "There were bees in that cave."

"I see," I said. "Bees."

Pretty soon we found another cave. My companion smiled in a satisfied manner. "No bees here," he said. "Only crocodiles." He pointed downstream to where some crocodiles were, indeed, sunning themselves. The rest of the car passengers began arriving, and so, I was glad to observe, did a picnic lunch, carried by any number of servants. It was a very elaborate one—wicker hampers, china plates, silver knives and forks. We had just finished eating when somebody cried, "The planes! The planes!"

Crawling out of the cave, we saw three mosquitolike objects high above the river, and as we watched they circled and dropped out of sight in the direction of the airstrip. We headed for it, too, and by the time we got there, the planes, neatly lined up abreast, were entirely surrounded by the beaters and their families. Our host was busy giving



directions to his A.D.C.s; like them, he was wearing a jungle-green bush shirt and slacks, and a broad-brimmed hat. Everybody seemed to be bristling with rifles.

We all piled into whatever cars were handiest, and were driven away. Finding myself in a jeep with four experienced tiger-shooters, I asked, just to show that I belonged, "Has it killed?"

"No," replied one of my companions, a man with a big mustache.

So there we were; in any case, I decided to stop fretting. We were again driving straight through the jungle, but it wasn't at all bad in the jeep. Besides, this trip didn't last long; after perhaps a quarter of an hour we halted, with the rest of the vehicles, close to the rim of a sharply carved-out valley.

Climbing out of the jeep, I wandered about until I had corralled my three female companions from Bombay. Then we stood around—just women in a man's world, waiting to be told what to do next.

The man who told us what to do next—or, rather, what not to do next—was His Highness of Bundi. He walked up and stood looking at us for a moment. Sadly and slowly, he shook his head. "Ladies," he said, "I'm sorry, but really, ladies, you can't go after tiger in those clothes. They'd show up."

Imagine our not knowing! Downcast and ashamed, we stood silent—Ruth and Betty in white shirts, Indira in mustard slacks, Florence in something gay that had been hand-woven by the natives of Bengal, and I, although my slacks

were properly olive drab, wearing a checked shirt with a bit of red in it. Yet perhaps it wasn't only our attire, for Jacqueline and Norma, who were correctly dressed in khaki shorts and khaki topees, and even Manjeed, the Sikh girl, who had borrowed a tiger-shooting outfit from His Highness's own wardrobe, were culled out, too, and put in our dejected little group, while the men with their rifles moved off into the valley. Then, all of a sudden, His Highness relented. Out of the throng of hunters stepped a man with a bristling, pointed mustache, who walked back to us and said, "His Highness has decided that all you ladies may come along—to a certain point—and that you will be under my supervision. He has asked me to tell you ladies that you simply *must* be quiet during the beat. You must not talk. You must not even whisper. And another thing—you must not move. You must sit absolutely quiet. You must not so much as turn your heads, because a tiger has exceptional powers of vision. Do you understand?" We nodded and murmured "Yes," whereupon our mentor instructed us to follow him.

Presently, the men up ahead halted and conferred, and we lingered a safe distance behind—brilliantly plumaged but cowed. The conference, it turned out, was to make a final disposition of forces. His Highness of Rewa, with appropriate attendants, was posted down the slope from the cars, at a point overlooking heavy jungle. The Maharajah of Bikaner was assigned to a position on the other side of the valley closer to the valley floor. Our host stationed himself on the far side of the valley, too, near its upper end.

With our mustached escort and a couple of other men, we were sent to the very top of the valley, on the near side, just beyond a seasoned bunch from Jodhpur. The beaters were well down the valley, waiting for the signal to go to work.

Doing our best to tread lightly, we proceeded over rock rubble and dry, thorny undergrowth to a *machan*, or blind. Most *machans* are built in trees, but ours was on the ground—a screen of bamboo stalks interwoven with twigs and leaves. In it were several neatly buttonhole-stitched openings, and by kneeling or sitting or squatting we could peer through them and get a splendid view of the valley, spread out before us like a stadium. We had a fine sense of isolation. Little cushions scattered about on a picnic rug made the place very comfortable, and, all in all, I began to feel better about our *gaffe* in the matter of clothes. Graham, with his camera, showed up from somewhere and stationed himself high on a rock above us, in full sight of any tigers in the valley, but, of course, he was dressed for it. Then, to our surprise, Louis, the Belgian diplomat, straggled into the *machan*. Like Graham, he was disguised against tigers and had no need to lurk behind the screen, but lurk he did. Waiting for tigers bored him, he said, and he stretched out on the rug and fell asleep. The Jodhpur veterans down the valley from us didn't need a *machan* and didn't have one; they sat motionless on a series of rocky outcroppings some distance away.

I crouched behind Norma at one of the peepholes and stared over her shoulder. The jungle verdure was so dry that the stratifications of the valley's steep opposite side

were almost naked to the sun, while the few trees growing on its narrow floor did not obscure the ground. In a clearing around one of the trees was a large, dark, motionless object. The buffalo, I thought—the tiger *had* killed. I was just about to poke Norma when the object stood up and switched its tail.

Really, we behaved very well. We didn't say a single word; that is, the women didn't. The men, however, conversed at length; perhaps it is only the female voice that alarms tigers. Time went by with the speed of a glacier; we had been crouching there for at least three-quarters of an hour when Florence reached up to push back a strand of her hair. Our guardian with the mustache was on to it in a flash. "Keep your hand still!" he cried, waving an admonitory arm furiously.

Then, suddenly, from the other end of the valley, came a sound like the wailing of banshees. The beaters were beating. They thumped on drums and blew horns and banged on tin plates and fired off guns, all the while ululating and shouting. ("What were they all shouting, anyway?" I asked Shambhu Nath later. "Oh, you know," he replied. "Telling the tiger not to be such a coward, to come out and fight—that sort of thing.") Once the beaters started their din, the whole jungle woke up. Birds made little rushes from branch to branch, keeping a prudent distance ahead of the invasion. Langurs moved faster, though they didn't seem to be really in rout, either; they maintained their dignity, sometimes running rapidly, but now and then pausing to turn and stare back in dowagerlike disapproval. Hares and peacocks hur-

ried past us. Then, after one last hare, the jungle was still. It was then that I heard a new sound—neither loud nor of long duration, but a muted rumble, as if from a giant's stomach. It was a tiger's roar if ever I had heard one. Still, it seemed to come from the wrong direction—from *behind* the beaters. Surely, though, that was impossible, I told myself, and I continued to stare past Norma's motionless shoulder at the deserted mountainside. Another fifteen minutes brought many of the beaters into sight, making their way along the sides of the valley. Apparently, our guardian deduced from their manner that the tiger had got away, for he suddenly lost all interest in us, and, unrebuked, we rose to stretch our aching muscles. I tried to get him to explain what had happened, but he was as taciturn now as he had been talkative while waiting for the beaters to begin.

On the way back from the *machan*, the women, finally undammed, chattered. One of them insisted there had been no tiger at all. Another agreed that this was true, but said there *had* been a bear—in fact, three bears. On the contrary, said a third, not only had there been a tiger but it had come so close to the *machan* that she had actually smelled it—and she described the smell vividly. My sturdy claim to having heard the tiger roar met with no more general acceptance than any of the other versions of what had happened.

As we reassembled at the cars, it was clear that the participating males were ruffled, and equally clear that they were trying not to show it. In little knots, they stood around or sat on the ground, rehashing the fiasco. We all drove back

to the airstrip, and there we waited while the beaters were paid off in a lot of bulky, impressive-looking cash—bags and boxes full of it had been brought along for the purpose—and while each of them talked over the events of the day with His Highness. Indira joined me and said, "Wouldn't you like to change places with me and fly back? You really ought to see Bundi from the air, and now that I've done it once, I think it's your turn."

Though I demurred politely at first, I didn't need much urging, and installed myself in Indira's seat in the rear of Louis' plane, where Jacqueline presently joined me. Then Manjeed climbed into the front with Louis, and Mac came over to spin the propellers for us and give Louis some last-minute directions. "Circle around and wait for His Highness to get off the ground, then follow him in," he said.

It was just before sunset when we took off. We rose into a sky that was a more intense blue than it had been all through the parched day, above jungle land that looked greener than I would have believed possible. Our soap bubble circled and dipped happily, out and about and back over the airstrip, with its waiting cars and bright-topped crowd of beaters. One by one, the two other craft lifted, and then His Highness led us in a dancing journey across the sky—over rivers and dark hills and stretches of sand; over the city of Bundi, where even the Old Palace looked like a place for toy soldiers to live in; over the Phoolsagar Palace, white among its trees, white above its lake.

How was it that we didn't get the tiger?" I later asked His Highness. I was sitting beside him in a jeep as he drove it from the airport to the palace; in the back were his cousins and a lot of rifles.

"Well," he said, "Cousin Rewa was supposed to take it, and the beaters drove it straight past him, but he didn't shoot when he had the chance—out of politeness, he claims. He thought Cousin Bikaner might like the chance. He expected the tiger to cross the valley to Bikaner's side, and, to be sure, most tigers would have done that; they usually zigzag when they're being driven. In the meantime, I had ordered the beaters away from behind the tiger and up on the hillsides, to keep it from getting out of the valley. But then it was clever enough to turn around and go straight back down the valley—a most unusual maneuver. Rewa should certainly have shot as soon as he saw it, and not left it for Bikaner. It was right there in front of him. We all saw it. You ladies didn't, because it didn't get far enough up the valley, but I understand that you heard it roar. It's bad for the morale of the villagers, you know," he added.

"All that work for nothing. They were disappointed. I told them *exactly* how it happened."

A little nervously, I glanced back over my shoulder at His Highness of Rewa, to see how he was taking all this, but he showed no sign of embarrassment or pique; looking calm and cheerful, he sat listening to His Highness of Bikaner, who was as chatty as ever.

It was getting dark when, with the guards slamming to attention, we drove through the gate to the palace. Massed flowers in the garden sent out strong gusts of fragrance, the way flowers in India always do at dusk, as if they were sighing with relief at the first breeze. And I, too, sighed with relief. With my first tiger shoot behind me, I was now on firmer ground—at least conversationally.



# The Yellow Flour





**T**he long, mirrored table in the banquet hall glittered beautifully enough to satisfy even our critical host, for that night, the eve of his birthday, it was set with crystal and silver, and ornamented with vases of flowers. And we who surrounded it had done our best to make ourselves glitter, too. Possibly the males could have been more gorgeous; in the old days they would have been decked out in silk and gauze, with jeweled turbans and gold-and-enamel necklaces, but now even our host hadn't been willing to go as far as that. They were striking enough, though, in their national dress, which is dramatic in its sober way, and there is no denying they set off to advantage the eight women present, who provided the dash and color. That, after all, was what we had been asked to the birthday party for. Ruth had chosen a smart Paris gown for the evening. The two Indian women among us were particularly lovely—Indira was wearing a rich gold-brocaded Benares sari, and Manjeed reminded me of a princess in a Mogul painting.

The whole room looked wonderful, in fact, especially after the venison was served, and our long-stemmed glasses,

filled now with red Burgundy, were reflected in the table top as clearly as the Taj Mahal is reflected in its pool on a still day. At a later stage of this rather late dinner, the servants poured champagne, adding a second reflected color—delicate amber next to a glass here and there that still held a few drops of Burgundy. In no mood to sit mutely admiring the contrast, I took a swallow and, turning to Maharaj Ajit Singh, on my left, said, "A miracle of rare device."

Immediately I regretted it. Ever since arriving at Phool-sagar Palace, I had tried—until then successfully—to restrain a dreary habit I have of quoting lines from English classics. Now, thrown off my guard by the urbane surroundings, I had slipped. A pity. To make matters worse, I had inflicted this affront on Maharaj Ajit Singh, of all people—a lovable old man and a doughty soldier and hunter, who, as uncle of the three leading princes at the party, was known to one and all as Uncle Ponk. And Uncle Ponk did seem taken aback. Luckily, before he could summon up a reply, I was saved from almost certain chagrin by the crash of a cannon. Midnight and noonday are always announced at Bundi in this manner. After a day and a half, we visitors had grown sufficiently accustomed to the procedure not to flinch, and tonight we welcomed the noise of the cannon with a feeling of expectancy, for it marked both the beginning of His Highness's birthday and the beginning of Holi, a gala Hindu holiday. Everyone stopped talking and looked toward our host. Handsome and smiling, he rose to his feet and made a little speech, in which he extended a formal welcome to the guest of honor—his cousin the Maha-

rajah of Rewa, who was paying his first visit to the recently built Palace of Phoolsagar. We toasted Rewa, who, in turn, made a little speech in reply to his cousin Bundi, and after that we toasted Bundi. The Maharao Rajah appeared genuinely pleased and very happy. With Graham's ubiquitous camera in mind, he had taken an immense amount of trouble to have everything just right—even to the extent of saddling himself with all of us strange women. Pondering all the care that His Highness had lavished on the spectacle, I decided that if he hadn't been born a prince, he might well have gravitated into show business, as one of those directors who personally supervise every phase of a production—costumes, stage sets, choreography, and all the rest.

Then I checked myself, as I frequently had to do during the time I spent at Phoolsagar Palace. Born a prince? Yes, true enough—born heir to the throne of the princely state of Bundi, in the former Rajputana Agency—but His Highness was a prince no longer, and had not been one since 1947, when India became independent. And this, of course, applied to all the other Highnesses at the table, as well as to the rest of India's princes. Even so, I mused, all the Highnesses present, and probably the vast majority of the others, still sported their titles and were still looked upon as superior beings by many of their former subjects. Clearly, then—as far as this generation was concerned—having been born a prince, having been raised in the tradition of an heir apparent, and having duly acceded to a title, whatever its present status, did set a man apart, at least enough to re-

strain him from pursuing a career of his choice, in the manner of most reasonably well-endowed mortals.

So, in the aftermath of the toasts, I sank back into a speculative mood and diverted myself by fitting some of the other Highnesses in the dining room into possible alternative roles. There was the Maharajah of Rewa, for example. To be sure, Rewa had talked to me of nothing but game and guns, but that could be said of nearly all the other men, too, and since it struck me that he had a rather more intellectual face than the rest—or could it have been the spectacles he wore?—I now imagined him as a scientist or scholar of some kind. Next, I tackled the Maharajah of Bikaner. Here, I suspected, the princely background might have had an entirely different effect. He had obviously found his place in politics and was doing well, but if he hadn't started out with the prestige and responsibility of being a ruler, would he have set his sights so high? I fancied not; I thought I could see him, instead, as a P. G. Wodehouse character—not exactly Bertie Wooster, but one of those other young men. He had the gay charm, the light-hearted approach to things, and the amiable lack of sense of self-importance to play the part admirably.

U

pon leaving the table, we were led out onto the lawn and alongside the palace toward a part of the building none of us had yet explored. As our ranks shifted, I found myself next to our host. I told him I thought his party was a great success, and said I had heard that he gave one every year.

“Yes, every year,” His Highness said.

“Do you always invite strangers like this, along with your friends?” I asked.

I was merely interested in whether this was a long-established custom, and certainly I had no intention of criticizing the arrangements, but His Highness assumed a defensive manner. He straightened, his eyes flashed moonlight at me, and he said, “Yes, I do. And why not?”

“No reason in the world,” I replied hastily. “I’m sure we’re all delighted to be here. It’s such a fine party.”

“It does seem to be going well,” His Highness said, with a sudden softening of mood. “The table looked nice, I thought.”

A few minutes later, His Highness excused himself to

move on up to the head of the crowd, and I fell in with the rest of the guests, who were making their way in a ragged procession through a shadowy cloister. I could see some of my fellow revelers up ahead turning in at an open door, and as I drew nearer I could hear their voices inside—feminine squeals and shrill giggles and masculine exclamations of amazement. When I entered, I was amazed, too. For a puzzled moment, I felt as if I had walked into one of those big glass display cases in the Museum of Natural History. In a murky jungle light, a seated stuffed tiger, looking more immense than any tiger has a right to be, all but snarled at me. A little farther along, up a short flight of stairs, an equally irritable bear stood reared up on its hind legs, brandishing a lamp with a red bulb glowing in it. Opposite the bear sat a tigress and two cubs, staring at me in a disconcertingly lifelike way. And other animals were scattered around, too. To each of them, I was later informed, is attached some special story relating to a past shoot.

As a place with chummy associations, therefore, the Museum of Natural History runs a poor second to His Highness's private night club—for that is what this soon proved to be. Beyond the collection of animals was a circular room with a waxed dance floor suffused by a faint, rosy light. Over to one side, an orchestra—brought from Bombay for the occasion, somebody whispered—was playing. Adjoining this room was a small lounge, also pink-lit, in which stood a bar, with a bartender behind it, and some stools, upholstered in tiger skin, lined up in front of it, as well as two or three little tables and a couple of cozy corner nooks. Another



enormous tiger was in the act of springing straight out of one wall, and on the floor was a wall-to-wall carpet of tiger skin. I could have stood in wonder at all this for a long time, but Graham had joined me, and his mind, as usual, was on photography; he insisted that I accompany him back to the room with all the stuffed animals and join the other women and some of the princes in posing for pictures there. Ruth chose to pose with the tiger near the entrance; Jacqueline posed with the cubs; and Their Highnesses went around posing wherever Graham told them to. I had my picture taken with the bear and two maharajahs. The latter then escorted me back to the bar. The band played, the bartender mixed drinks, and shadows flickered on the tiger-skin carpet. We might have been spending an evening out in London or New York or Paris, but for one discrepancy; despite the diligent efforts of the band from Bombay, nobody was dancing.

**A**fter an hour or so in the night club, I parted company with the maharajahs and, returning to more familiar territory, went out on a second-story veranda of the palace, from which, I had been told, the sight of the moonlight on the surface of the pool was exceptionally beautiful. Near me, in the dark, I heard two men discussing something, and when they presently moved toward me, they turned out to be the Maharao Rajah and one of his three aides-de-camp—a giant named Amar Singh, who, Graham had told me, had been trained as a wrestler and was related to the princely family. Formerly, Graham said, when an old maharanee with Bundi connections died, it became the reigning Highness's traditional duty to have his head shaved as a token of mourning. Amar Singh, however, had spared his master the necessity of making this onerous gesture by having his own head shaved instead.

Hoping to find out how I stood now with my host, I said cheerfully, "How do you do, Your Highness? This palace has so many delightful surprises. You designed it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I designed it," His Highness said. We stood at the veranda railing and gazed down at the pool; it was as if we were on the deck of a ship, gazing out over the sea. Looking at his face in the moonlight, I thought he appeared quietly satisfied with his handiwork. "I had nothing to do with the pool, though," he added. "That dates back to the seventeenth century. Before I built this palace, there was a little house on the site that my father used as a shooting box. We often came out here after game when I was a boy, and in those days it was a fairly depressing spot—all overgrown with jungle and quite dark. It's hard to believe now, but the whole place was like a ruin. Rather sad. We were living in the Old Palace then, of course. Have you seen that?"

"Not yet," I replied, but I definitely hoped to visit it, for I had heard a lot about this ancient curiosity that is perched on a cliffside overlooking the city of Bundi.

"You'll understand why I built this when you see the old one," His Highness went on. "It would be almost impossible to live there nowadays, in the condition it's in, and as for restoring it, or modernizing it so that we'd be comfortable—well, that would be ruinously expensive. Plumbing and all that, you know. And building this proved to be very interesting. I learned a lot, working with architects and such people. As a boy, I was away at school and didn't give much thought to where I would live, because it's been the custom for each Maharao Rajah to build a palace for his heir by adding a section to the Old Palace. For a long while, my father planned to build one for me

in the customary way, but he finally decided it would be better for me to build my own palace when I acceded to the throne. That way, I'd have the kind of palace I wanted. He was right. As it happened, I didn't get around to doing it until after the war, when I came back from Burma, but then——"

Forgetting that I was on my self-imposed good behavior, I interrupted him to ask if, by any chance, while he was in Burma he had come to know a brother-in-law of mine who had also been on duty there—Brigadier Miles Smeeton, of Probyn's Horse.

His Highness, who had been staring absently at the pool, whirled around and grabbed me by the shoulders. "Know Miles!" he exclaimed, laughing uproariously, "Miles? Why, I was *with* him! He was my officer! Know him, indeed!" He turned to Amar Singh, who understood only simple English, and talked to him excitedly in his own language. Then, turning back to me, he said, "Amar Singh was also there." I shook hands with Amar Singh, who laughed, and His Highness and I laughed, too.

We had all become so diverted by this coincidence that we barely noticed a pair of headlights gliding in from the entrance gate in the walls surrounding the palace grounds and down a driveway that ran alongside the veranda. But now, as the lights came to a stop directly beneath us, we saw that they belonged to a jeep, and that it was crowded with men, who jumped to the ground and began lifting something heavy out of the vehicle. I heard His Highness of Bikaner's voice issue what sounded like an order, and

a moment later three or four servants carrying torches ran out of the palace. My host and Amar Singh went to investigate, and before long a Bikaner A.D.C. came to fetch me, telling me that his prince had just shot something and that I ought to come along and see it. "His Highness is as good a shot as his grandfather," he added proudly.

I found Bikaner presiding casually over the warm, bloody corpse of a hyena. At the instigation of the A.D.C., rather than through any wish of my own, I bent and stroked the animal's fur, finding it coarse and bristly. A good many of the guests had evidently gone to bed since I had left the princely night club, but enough were still up to form an animated circle around the little tableau in the driveway—Highness, hyena, and jeep—and Bikaner was kept busy answering questions about where he had spotted the quarry and at what distance he had dropped it. But the guests in that circle were all men, I noticed, and I judged that it was high time for me to call it a night.

The next morning, Indira woke up early, and, looking out her window at the seventeenth-century pool lying just beyond it, saw His Highness swimming with a young girl—later identified by an A.D.C. as the Princess Kitten, the fifteen-year-old daughter of the house, who had been away, visiting a friend, at the time of our arrival. Before long, her father began giving her a diving lesson, and Indira described it to Ruth and me when we stopped by to see her in midmorning. The pool was hardly ideal for swimming, being a haunt of turtles and perhaps of snakes, and it had no diving board—a drawback that His Highness overcame by taking the Princess up to a balcony on the second floor and plunging in from there, to set her an example. “He’s a wonderful diver,” Indira said, “but I should think he’d be dead of fatigue. He didn’t get to bed at all, or so I gathered from an A.D.C.” Kitten, not unnaturally, had seemed reluctant to dive from such a height, but her father had insisted, and finally she had followed him in. “She made a good dive, too,” Indira added.

The Princess Kitten was the only member of His High-

ness's immediate family who was ever in evidence during the house party. That morning, as Ruth and I chatted with Indira and waited for the Holi celebrations to begin, we agreed it was not remarkable that Bundi should be doing all the honors. After all, his daughter was too young to share them; his only other child, a seventeen-year-old son, was away at school; and Her Highness was in purdah in another part of the palace.

I don't know about the others, but I was looking forward somewhat apprehensively to the forthcoming Holi festivities. I'd never been mixed up in one of those celebrations, and I wasn't quite sure what to expect—except that I'd heard lots of talk in Bombay about how extremely rough the people can become if they really let themselves go on this particular day. Leaving Indira's quarters, the three of us went out and settled ourselves in armchairs in the courtyard off the drawing room, where it soon became apparent that something out of the way was already brewing. Not a maharajah was to be seen, but servants were hurrying back and forth, bringing out some unidentifiable objects and setting them down near the basin of a fountain in the center of the courtyard. During a lull in their activity, I went over to investigate and found two tin bathtubs full of bottles, paper-wrapped packages, and tall, slender pewter pitchers. I returned to my armchair, and Indira said one of the A.D.C.s had dropped the information, as he bustled past, that the Highnesses were all at the temple in the city of Bundi, where the opening ceremonies took place. "You've never been in India for Holi, have you?" she asked me,

and when I shook my head, she laughed, and said, "The city must be quite a sight at this very moment, with people jamming the streets and throwing pink water and dyed flour at each other. We're well out of it, I can tell you. I wouldn't be over in Bundi this morning for anything."

Shambhu Nath, the most vocal of Bundi's A.D.C.s, came along in time to catch Indira's last words, and said, "You wouldn't be able to get through the streets. When His Highness comes out of the temple, you see, the people mob him. It's great fun, but it's rather rough on bystanders."

"It must be much more exciting up here in Bundi than in Bombay," Ruth said. "There they just throw a little water around."

"It is," said Shambhu Nath, and went away without elaborating.

"Holi in Delhi is dreadful," Indira said. "I've been through it two or three times. You have to keep all your doors and windows locked. If anything is left open, the people come straight into the house and search you out. They spoil the furniture and the rugs and everything. I wouldn't be too sure the people here can be kept out of the palace, either. Holi is one day when they can do whatever they want."

Ruth was inclined to disparage Indira's concern. "Not that I've ever spent Holi anywhere outside Bombay, but everybody knows it's just good clean fun," she said. "Well, not exactly clean in one sense of the word, though." Turning to me, she added, "If I were you, I'd wear my oldest clothes. The dye in that water and flour is the very devil to



get out. I've brought shorts and a shirt I can throw away afterward, and it might be a good idea if we did our hair up in towels. As I understand it, the fun will start when the Highnesses get back from the city."

We therefore went off to our rooms to dress for the celebration, and it was in far from elegant costumes, topped off with a species of coif made from hand towels and safety pins, that we returned to the courtyard. More members of the house party had assembled by then, among them Betty. She had witnessed the princes' departure for the temple, and she reported that they had looked very smart as they drove off through the gate, where a great swarm of people from the surrounding countryside were waiting eagerly. No, she said, in reply to our questioning, none of them had thrown anything, as far as she knew, since the throwing—at the palace, anyway—was not to begin until noon.

"Look!" Indira whispered, nudging me. "There's the Princess Kitten." I looked, and saw a pretty youngster in khaki slacks and a pink shirt, standing off by herself at one side of the courtyard. I was rather relieved at her presence, since I figured that His Highness would keep his daughter out of the way if the party was going to get too out of hand. This was hardly the moment, I decided, to strike up a conversation with a princess, and, as a matter of fact, I did not get around to talking with Kitten until a couple of days later, when she made an appearance among the guests who had settled in garden chairs on the lawn to cool off before dressing for dinner. She was a quiet girl, but not painfully shy, and, sitting there in the gathering dark, we had an easy

conversation about shops and hairdressers in Bombay. On that occasion, she was wearing a white sari and a white choli, or jacket, the costume of adult Indian women, but she told me it was only because of the party; on ordinary days, she said, she dressed the way many other young Indian girls do—in fitted tunics and loose trousers. It's a less awkward outfit than a sari for an active life, she observed. After that casual tête-à-tête, Kitten and I were, I think, good friends.

All at once, we heard barked orders and the clash of rifles, and what we hoped was a purely ceremonial gun shot, and a moment later the maharajahs walked in. We stood gaping. After spending much of the past two days with Their Highnesses, we should have had no difficulty in recognizing them, but in spite of their vastly different shapes and sizes, we now couldn't tell which was which. Encrusted from turban to slipper with dyed, dried powder, they looked like mobile statues of brilliant-colored rock or clay. Graham ran forward with his inevitable camera, and while they posed obligingly, we moved closer to get a good look. The most heavily coated of the lot hailed me, saying, "Recognize me?"

The voice helped, of course, and as I peered at the mask of yellow flour that covered the man's very eyelashes, I realized that this was our host. "They lifted me right out of the jeep and carried me on their shoulders," he told me. "I've never seen them so wild. An old woman shoved a cupful of powder straight into my mouth, and it nearly choked me. Almost made me sick."

While he was speaking, the courtyard had been quietly filling with the people from the countryside who had been waiting at the gate. They kept coming and coming, until the place was thronged. Bright turbans, brown skins, shining eyes and teeth, beads, gold jewelry, dye-spattered clothes—I wouldn't have thought such a spectacle possible outside a theatre. Another example of His Highness's talent for the stage, I thought, but then I remembered that here was one show he could scarcely be held responsible for. In fact, it wasn't a show at all; it was just India.

All morning, I had been vaguely aware of drums beating in the distance. Now they were drawing nearer, and soon the drummers were right there in the courtyard with us. Their Highnesses moved to the edge of the fountain, and the Maharajah of Rewa picked up one of the tall, slender pitchers, dipped it full of water, and started to pour it, politely, on His Highness of Bundi's feet. Bundi pushed him aside and, filling a pitcher of his own, poured the contents over the feet of Uncle Ponk. Then, somewhere in the princes' midst, there was a scuffling and a splashing, and the quiet courtesy of the ceremony vanished. In a flash, a whole lot of people besides Highnesses were scooping up water and throwing it around.

We women swiftly retreated to the relative safety of a room just off the courtyard and, from its windows, watched the fracas out in the sun. Four young girls from the crowd, whose accuracy and forceful technique suggested long practice, waded into the basin and set to work with their pitchers, using them like scoops. They were soon hard pressed

for elbowroom, as the fountain's pool became a seething mass of maharajahs, village girls, and A.D.C.s. In the meantime, non-aquatic merrymakers had torn open the paper parcels, from which they drew out handfuls of the dyed flour and threw it at the people in the water and at one another. Then, gradually, the turbulence subsided. The water-scoopers climbed out of the basin to warm themselves in the sun, and the flour-throwers dispersed, the contents of their parcels exhausted. Now His Highness of Bundi appeared with a bottle of brilliant emerald-green liquid, which he dispensed among his subjects—or, rather, former subjects, though it was obvious that to them he was still the sovereign and they his people. One by one, the men and women approached him, bowed low, and, cupping their hands, waited while he filled them with green liquid, which they then conveyed, without the waste of a drop, to their mouths. As I watched, His Highness firmly refused to fill the hands of a small boy.

“That's country liquor,” said a man at my side, and, turning, I saw that it was Mac. “I advise you not to try it. It's awful.”

He and I drifted over to a long table where attendants were serving alternatives to country liquor—prosaic drinks like gin and whisky. Then, glasses in hand, we resumed our places at the window to see what turn the festivities would take now. Just as we got there, a boy, dressed in Holi-splotched shirt and dark trousers, stepped forward from the crowd and, facing Their Highnesses, who were standing in a neat line, began to make a speech. I didn't understand a

word of it, since it was in the vernacular, but I gathered from his inflections and gestures that it was a paean of praise, and more than likely indelicate.

At some earlier point in the proceedings, the drums had died away, but when the youthful speaker finished, they started up again, and he began to dance, with amazing agility, to their beat. Pretty soon the whole throng joined in, cavorting in a wild and seemingly senseless way. The dancing went on for hours—until six o'clock, or thereabouts—but shortly after four Ruth and I concluded that we had had enough when we suddenly realized that we hadn't had any lunch. We went up to our suite to order some, but decided we would have to postpone our meal a bit longer when we discovered that a considerable amount of the dye had somehow landed on us and that only the most vigorous scrubbing would remove it. After we had attended to this, we were served curry in little silver bowls, and then we lay down in our dressing gowns for a rest before dinner.

That night, we were not to gather in the drawing room before dinner, His Highness having announced that the locale of the party would shift for the evening to the country club, up near the gatehouse. Like the night club, this, too, was a private establishment, the exclusive property of His Highness, and any of the guests in our party who expected to find a few businessmen from Bundi swapping stories in the locker room or lounging in the smoking room were due to be disappointed. What we did find, after strolling over to the club through the moonlight, was an outdoor ballroom, open to the sky but walled in by a high, thick boxwood hedge. I was told that the club's facilities also included a squash court and a swimming pool, but I didn't see them. On one side of the ballroom stood a small white kiosk, in which there was a bar, with more—or perhaps the same—tiger-skin stools ranged in front of it. The bartender of the night before was again in charge; he was eminently qualified for the job, for although he could neither speak nor understand a single sentence of conversational English, he knew the name—and the makings—of every drink in the

book. In the center of the room, which otherwise was floored with turf, was a cement dance floor, and at one end was a raised platform, where the band of the previous evening was playing. The lights were subdued, and the high-collared white coats the male guests had elected to wear that evening glowed as if reflecting only the moon. Kitten was there, in a snowy-white sari, closely attending a kinswoman—Her Highness the Maharanee of Kotah, who, with her husband, the Maharao of Kotah, had driven over from their palace that afternoon, bringing a whole flock of additional Highnesses with them. Everybody stood around on the grass floor, which was pale in the moonlight, and chatted. It was all very lovely and unreal.

“But nobody’s dancing,” I heard Florence lament to the Maharajah of Bikaner. “Why don’t you dance, Your Highness? This is such a waste!” His Highness replied, with a merry laugh, that he never danced; he had promised his wife not to. Florence finally went and found Graham, and, along with Max and Norma, they took the floor, but no other couples joined them.

Shambhu Nath came by, lit a cigarette for me, and remained to talk, at my instigation, about life in the palace. Normally, he said, the A.D.C.s worked in rotation, each putting in two full days and nights on duty and then spending the rest of the week at home, which, in his case, was a farm he owned not far from Phoolsagar. “Naturally, at times like this the routine is different,” he went on. “At the moment, all three of us are on duty constantly. But it’s only like this twice a year—at Christmas and on the birthday. We



enjoy these busy periods. They mean a big change for us, and that makes them fun. All the rest of the year, it's very quiet around here. *Very* quiet. His Highness farms fifty thousand acres, and he goes out every day to look at his crops and livestock, and to keep an eye on the tigers. There's quite a bit of office work, too. Ordinarily, both the Prince and Princess are away at school, but this past year Kitten has been kept home because of her health. Then, too, His Highness is away some of the time, since he's an A.D.C. to the President and must do his tours of duty in New Delhi. He'll be going back there again next month. All in all, we keep busy, but in a quiet way, especially at the time of the rains—the monsoon. One can't go out at all then, except where the roads are paved. So you can see why we welcome these parties, even though we don't get much sleep during them."

"Certainly His Highness doesn't," I said.

Shambhu looked across the room, with a slight frown of worry, to where His Highness stood talking with the Maharanee of Kotah, while Kitten listened raptly. "We simply *must* persuade him to go to bed tonight," he said. "You know, he's a very good employer. Not everyone in his position would be so considerate, I assure you. To give you an example, he has never in his life corrected me in the presence of other people. That's not his way. If I make a mistake, he waits until we're alone to tell me about it."

I remarked that I would scarcely expect a Highness to upbraid an A.D.C. in public.

Shambhu shook his head. "In India it's not unusual,"

he said. "But don't think that His Highness isn't strict. He gives the people who work for him three chances. They can make the same mistake once, then twice. But the third time—out!"

In response to some signal that I failed to see, Shambhu suddenly resumed his formal, efficient manner and went back to work. A moment later, the music ceased; evidently, the party was about to move elsewhere. Kitten was sent to bed, not without making a gentle plea to be allowed to stay just a few minutes more, to which her father replied firmly, "You are a bit young for late nights." Then we filed out through the gap in the hedge, and walked a short distance to a brightly illuminated white building whose lofty doors stood open.

A round, paved, pillared structure, like a pavilion turned upside down, this, too, was open to the sky. Wide trestle tables had been set with an elaborate feast, the *pièce de résistance* being a whole roast boar. I sat next to Uncle Ponk, and during the meal I asked the old man how he felt after his strenuous day. Not so good, he replied, and went on to explain, "My back is rather painful, because of what happened in the fountain. I don't know if you saw that. They picked me up and set me down flat on my back in the water—just for a joke, you see. It was His Highness of Bundi himself who had me by the ankles. But in the excitement he didn't notice that my face was underwater. I couldn't breathe, and in struggling to get my head above the surface I seem to have strained my back. Did you know that His Highness himself had an accident that might have been

very serious?" I shook my head, and he went on, "Late in the afternoon, he slipped on the marble near the fountain and struck his head on one of the steps. He was quite unconscious for a minute or two. We were most disturbed."

When I got the opportunity, I asked His Highness about this. Was he sure that he hadn't suffered a concussion? He said no, he thought he hadn't; he was feeling all right now. "But I must tell my people to put matting down there next year," he added. "It gets too slippery the way it is."

I don't imagine the A.D.C.s had much difficulty persuading His Highness to go to bed early that night. As for the guests, we all retired soon after dinner, or so I thought, but early the next morning I was awakened by the sound of running footsteps on the veranda outside our window, against a background of confused chatter in the distance. Then there was a knock on the door, and I started to get out of bed. In the darkness, I heard Ruth say softly, "You'll open that over my dead body."

"But maybe it's some sort of trouble," I said.

"Go back to sleep!" Ruth said, so tensely that I did not press the matter.

We both were rather sorry about this later that morning, when we learned what all the excitement had been about. It seemed that the indefatigable Maharajah of Bikaner had done it again, going out in a jeep at midnight to shoot—with Jacqueline and Norma and Mac as passengers—and that this time he had brought back a panther. It was Jacqueline who had knocked on our door; Bikaner had sent her to rouse the other guests, so that they might see the freshly killed

beast, and all the rest of them had obeyed the summons. Betty described the scene to us. "The trouble was, the panther wasn't quite dead, but nobody knew that," she said. "They told me to go up close and pat it, so I did, and just then it sort of stretched out its paws and jumped a little. They had to shoot it again—right there in front of me."

Ruth had some letters she wanted to write that morning, so, leaving her to it, I dropped in to see Indira, and found her in a quietly jubilant mood. An intellectual type, she had felt guilty all along about being in such exclusively sporting surroundings, and had repeatedly tried to get someone to take her on a tour of the Old Palace, so that she could see some of the antiquities for which the place is noted. Now, she said, Shambhu Nath had finally found the time—and an unspoken-for station wagon—to accommodate her, and they were due to start out in half an hour. I asked her if I might go along, and she replied that I was welcome to. “Shambhu warned me to be sure to wear low-heeled shoes, though,” she said. “He says it’s pretty rugged underfoot a lot of the way.”

I went back and changed into what I hoped was the proper attire for inspecting a centuries-old cliffside palace, and on my way to rejoin Indira I came upon His Highness, standing in a doorway and conferring with Shambhu Nath. My host bade me good morning, and after returning his greeting I remarked that I was about to go sight-seeing at the

Old Palace. Apparently, Shambhu Nath had not yet got around to telling him of the plan, for His Highness suddenly looked apprehensive. "I suppose you'll want to go through the armory," he said. "Too bad, because there are some signs in it that I've been intending to have removed. They're not nice."

The A.D.C. said something in his own tongue, and His Highness looked relieved. "It's all right," he said. "The signs have already been taken away. They bore some rather gruesome inscriptions, like 'With this weapon So-and-So was killed,' and several of them went into fairly extensive detail. No, not nice at all."

By the time our sight-seeing tour was over, I felt fairly certain that His Highness must have discovered at a very early age that proficiency in scrambling up and down stairs was at least as useful an accomplishment as the ability to walk on the horizontal, for the Old Palace is a many-layered structure, which partly burrows into and partly protrudes from—and sometimes, it seems, barely clings to—the almost perpendicular face of a mountain overlooking the city of Bundi, with a bewildering network of stairways connecting the various levels. A number of the stairways are out-of-doors and unprotected from the elements, but there are still more inside, where they serve as the flooring of dark, almost vertical tunnels. Often the stairways are no more than a series of platforms hacked out of the solid rock; some of the steps are shallow, while others are so high that I needed a boost from Shambhu Nath to get up them and shamelessly sat down to negotiate the descent. The exterior of the palace

is a honey-colored mass of masonry that looks, from a distance, as if it had been thrown at the mountainside, as a potter throws his clay, and had stuck where it landed. After a visit to Bundi, Kipling, in his *Letters of Marque*, wrote, "No one knows where the hill begins and where the Palace ends. . . . They say that there is as much room under as above ground, and none have traversed the whole extent of the Palace."

For centuries, a succession of Maharao Rajahs of Bundi—with their wives, their children, a lot of their relatives, their aides, and no doubt a lot of *their* relatives as well—lived in this architectural hodgepodge. There was plenty of room for everybody, because the place was good-sized to begin with, and through the years, in accordance with the tradition that each ruler provide his heir with a new palace, one Maharao after another built additional, progressively more modern layers, beginning near the top of the mountain and working down. Today the Old Palace—really an amalgam of many palaces—is empty (or at least as empty as an ancient building ever is in India, where the cost of maintaining a staff of caretakers is trifling), except on the infrequent occasions when its courtyards and pavilions are thrown open for certain official ceremonies. His Highness's widowed mother and grandmother live in a more up-to-date white house he built for them at the base of the mountain; when they want to visit their former home, they can reach it through a covered stone passageway which assures them the privacy they desire.

The road leading up to the entrance to the Old Palace

is paved with worn cobblestones and lined by two rows of irregularly spaced houses. As Indira and I, with Shambhu Nath at the wheel of the station wagon, approached our objective, we passed through a high, narrow gateway of carved stone and then between two almost life-size stone statues—one of a horse and the other of an elephant ridden by a mahout. Shambhu stopped the car, and said the horse was a likeness of an animal named Hanja that was owned by Ummad Singh, who was Bundi's sainted ruler in the eighteenth century—and thus, of course, an ancestor of His present Highness—and who, at the age of thirteen, rode the steed into battle to regain control of his country from a rival prince; Ummad Singh made out all right, but Hanja was mortally wounded. The second statue was of an elephant named Shiv Prasad, a gift to a seventeenth-century Bundi prince from the Mogul emperor Shah Jehan; if our guide told us the name of the mahout, I failed to catch it.

Just beyond the statues, the road began to climb steeply, and Shambhu said we would have to get out and make the rest of our pilgrimage on foot. A few yards ahead stood another gate, painted with colorful fish, which was closed and locked. Shambhu shouted something, and after a while a tottering old seneschal appeared and opened it with a ponderous key, admitting us to a courtyard surrounded by stables and carriage sheds. There were no horses in the stables and only a few decrepit carriages in the sheds, and the courtyard itself was bare except for a huge banyan tree in its center. The day was bright and blistering, so we



paused in the shade of the tree, and Shambhu said, "They used to keep their elephants in this courtyard. And the Hollywood people who came to Bundi to make the picture *Kim* filmed one of their scenes here. They . . ."

But I was less interested in the movies than in the real thing, so, notwithstanding the glare of the sun, I stepped out from under the tree and looked up, and up and up—first at a flat expanse of rock wall directly overhead, and then, above that, at the exterior of the palace, with its richness of protruding balconies and carved recesses ranged in a dizzying conglomeration of tiers. Presently, word was relayed to Shambhu from on high that the necessary doors and gates had been unlocked, and we moved on, climbing a steep, rough cobbled lane, or ramp, between two walls. Our next stop was the armory—a one-story, two-room building filled to overflowing, mostly with weapons that at one time or another had been used, as His Highness had deprecatingly informed me, to kill So-and-So. We were admitted by an attendant who is regularly stationed there to keep the firearms oiled and the knives sharp, not because His Highness ever intends to use these weapons—certainly not!—but because it is in the tradition of his forefathers to take care of one's fighting and hunting gear. Near the entrance was a little exhibit of modern objects. Two Japanese flags, somewhat the worse for wear, were suspended between a pair of Japanese swords above a table on which lay a haversack, some cartridges, a pile of coins, and a couple of bank notes—all Japanese—and below which stood a Japanese machine gun. Like the older exhibits, these items bore

labels of the innocuous sort pleasing to His Highness; they stated that the trophies in this display had been "captured by His Highness the Maharao Rajah Bahadur Singhji Bahadur, M.C., Maharao Rajah of Bundi, on 1/3/45, at Mile 8 on the Meiktila Road during the Meiktila Drive in Burma."

The Japanese machine gun was not the only weapon of its kind in the armory. Four centuries ago, some Bundi inventor came up with one, and it, too, was on exhibit—a contrivance resembling a pipe organ, with five barrels set side by side on a single stock. Farther inside the armory, I began to pick out items of greater interest to me, such as a *panja*, a club with a heavy brazen fist at one end, which, according to the label, was "used for smashing heads"; a *krapar*, a wavy-bladed knife for cutting off heads; an example of the terrible *chakra*, a disc-shaped weapon, its edges honed to razor sharpness, which, when properly hurled, zips through a man's neck like a circular saw; and an *asa*, a spear with a crosspiece to prevent the blade from penetrating an enemy's body to an irrecoverable depth—"invented and used," the label stated, "by Maharao Ummed Singh in 1750." Ummed Singh, it appeared, was not only a mighty warrior and an exalted holy man but an ingenious military inventor. Among the many weapons he designed, the attendant thought a repeating gun with hand-revolved chambers the best, but I was more taken by one that wasn't ostensibly a weapon at all. I was first attracted to it because it was so decorative—a metal rod shaped rather like a snake, with one end coiled to serve as a base and the other forking out, like a shooting stick. The attendant explained that it was an arm-

rest to be used while praying. "Here's how it works," he said, setting the thing upright and crouching beside it with one arm in the apex of the fork. "And here's what you do if someone attacks you while you're praying." He seized the forked end and gave a tug, and out of the snake's body came a knife with a long, sharp, slender blade. There is no doubt that Ummed Singh was a remarkable saint.

We left the armory and toiled on up the ramp to the Hathiopol, or Elephant Gate. Many old palaces and fortresses in India have such gates, which are shaped to allow elephants, complete with their "castles," or howdahs, to pass through them. (When the British took over the Fort in Delhi, they cunningly filled in the tops of its elephant gates, so that visitors—possibly hostile—would have to dismount from their castles and walk in.) But Bundi's gate is fancier than most, for above it two stone elephants strain toward each other from pedestals at either side, with the tips of their trunks touching at the center of the arch. As we walked through this portal into a spacious open square, an old re-tainer standing nearby struck a great gong, not, as I first imagined, to announce our arrival but to sound the hour of the day—according to Old Palace time, which is not necessarily that of the outside world. Shambhu told us that the old fellow was the custodian of the water clock, and guided us over to have a look at this peculiar device. It consisted of a brass bowl partly filled with water, in which was floating a smaller brass bowl that had a number of fine perforations in its sides. Water seeped at a fixed rate of speed from the larger bowl into the smaller one, the A.D.C. explained,

until finally the latter could no longer stay afloat. Each time it sank, indicating the passage of roughly a quarter of an hour, the old man struck the gong, and then emptied the bowl and set it on the surface of the water again.

Overlooking the square from the cliffside was a vast covered balcony, where the princes of long ago held their assemblies. Shambhu led us to it up a flight of stairs, and in its deserted state it seemed to me pretty bleak. Part of it was occupied by a shrouded marble throne, which had a rope barrier around it to keep visitors at a fitting distance. "His Highness—every one of our Highnesses—sat on that throne on the day of his accession," Shambhu said. "Our present Highness is planning to have a great show when Kitten marries, and it will, of course, take place here. As far as I am aware, no marriage has yet been arranged, but when it is, it will be a magnificent spectacle. Just imagine—the bridegroom on an elephant, coming up the ramp and through the Hathipol! There will have to be some modernization of the zenana before the wedding. It's a long climb up, and we may have to put in a lift for the convenience of the ladies, since naturally they'll all go into purdah while they're here."

Shambhu went on to say that the Princess's wedding party would be held in another section of the palace, high up on the cliff above the Elephant Gate courtyard, and we struggled on up to have a look at it. This palace-within-a-palace was built in the eighteenth century by a Bundi prince named Chhattarsal; known as the Chhattramahal, or Chhatter's Palace, it fronts on the Chhattramahal Chowk

—an open square—which would be the scene of the party. In the Chhatramahal, we saw a throne room with two silver thrones, and, next to it, an apartment with two silver bedsteads. Jutting out into space from the Chowk was a roofed balcony, and, peering down over its balustrade, I experienced for the first time a sense of being really high above the city. But, even at that elevation, its jumbled sounds—shouts, scraps of song, and ceaseless chattering—reached us with astonishing clarity, rising straight up like smoke on a still day.

I went back to the center of the Chowk and stood there looking up, trying to discern some semblance of a pattern in the design of the Old Palace—or at least to figure out where one prince's contribution to it ended and another's began—but I found the whole thing as confusing as the stratifications of the Mississippi Delta. Finally, I admitted defeat, and Shambhu tirelessly led us still farther up, through secret passageways inside the face of the cliff, past mirrored doors leading to the zenana, until, at last, we reached the Taragarh, or Star Fort, on the summit of the mountain.

The Star Fort was built way back in the early days by Rao Dewa, the founder of the city of Bundi, soon after he settled there, and it was strengthened over the subsequent centuries by his successors. A double wall encloses a green mesa, or meadow, which covers the mountaintop—the highest elevation for miles around—and in the center of this verdant expanse stands a species of ghost town, complete with a palace, several less pretentious residential buildings,

a temple, shops, and a number of iron foundries. "You see, none of this is visible from below," Shambhu pointed out proudly. "Not one stone in all these walls and buildings. The place is deserted now, of course, but the entire population of the city down below could move up here in the event of a siege. Even when there's a drought down in Bundi, there's always water up here; it used to be piped down to supply the Old Palace. There's plenty of pasture, and it's better than down in the valley—enough to feed thousands of sheep and cows. The people of the city could withstand a siege for a year up here." His expression was so dreamily confident as he gazed down from the top of the cliff—picturing to himself, I felt sure, the difficulties the terrain would present to a besieging prince from some neighboring state—that I did not have the heart to ask about the Taragarh's defenses against airplanes.

Wandering about, we came upon a great round slab of stone—"like the cap of a gigantic stone jar," Indira said. Our guide smiled faintly. "That's just about what it is," he told us. "Look, there's another, and another. This is the reserve granary, and those flat stones are the seals of storage bins that are sunk in the ground. Full of grain, in case of siege."

"Who put them there?" Indira asked, and Shambhu replied absently, "Some Highness. I forget now just which one."

Back in Phoolsagar Palace, I was fortunate enough to have a few words with His Highness when he joined his guests in the drawing room before lunch. “Those storage bins up at the Fort,” I began. “They’re incredible.”

“Well, I suppose they are, in a way,” His Highness said. “They’re all filled with grain, you know, and sealed tight. I don’t imagine the grain is any good any more, though. It’s been up there for hundreds of years.”

“If you don’t mind an abrupt change of subject, I’d like to ask you a question about elephants,” I said. “Shambhu Nath said that Kitten’s bridegroom—when the day comes—will arrive riding on an elephant. Tell me, have you any elephants?”

“Elephants?” His Highness echoed the word vaguely. “Oh, yes, elephants. No, I have none. Not any more. We used to have them, naturally. When I acceded to the throne, I had eleven.”

“Thirteen, your Highness,” said Shambhu Singh, who was standing at his master’s elbow.

My host shrugged. “Thirteen, then—I had thirteen ele-

phants," he said. "But the number kept changing. You give them away, for one thing."

"Do you?" I said.

"Yes," His Highness replied. "You give them away—at weddings, and all that. And then, too, they die. Little by little they die off, and regardless of what other people may do in such a situation, I never went out of my way to replace them." He looked at me rather defiantly, and added, "It costs a lot, you know, to keep elephants. They eat so much. And after all, when you come right down to it, what good are they?"



# View from the Mermaid Suite





As the car that had met me at the railroad station drew up in front of the office of Phoolsagar Palace, Shambhu Singh came out to greet me, and invited me inside. During the party, Shambhu Singh had worked like a Trojan at his social duties, and the palace office had been as forbiddingly clean-swept as the anteroom of a government bureaucrat; now he had the look of an efficient estate overseer, and the palace office rather reminded me of the workroom of an English country house. Not that there were mackintoshes and sou'westers hanging on the walls, but a couple of broad-brimmed shikar hats were lying carelessly on a bench, a rifle stood in one corner, and a tennis racket rested on a chair. I had expected to stay in the nearby city of Bundi as a paying guest in the local resthouse, but at the railroad station one of His Highness's men was waiting for me; instead of letting me off in Bundi, he skirted the town and continued on to the palace. Orders were orders, he gave me to understand, and no sooner had I shaken hands with

Shambhu Singh than I learned that there were further orders; His Highness had directed the A.D.C. to have Phoolsagar's Mermaid Suite made ready for me. Naturally, I was delighted.

As we walked across the courtyard toward the main entrance to the palace, Shambhu Singh informed me that His Highness was out inspecting some of his fields but would soon be back, and had left word that I should make myself at home. He added that Shambhu Nath had taken a train to Gwalior to bring young Peter back to the palace for his vacation. The biggest item of news, though, which Shambhu Singh imparted with a proud smile, was that the Princess Kitten had bagged her first panther—"yesterday, with one shot."

"For a girl of fifteen, she really is remarkable, isn't she?" I said.

"Oh, she's a good shot, all right," said Shambhu. "But it was a queer thing about her panther. It was evening, and His Highness and Kitten and I were sitting around a table outside, having tea. Somehow the subject of panthers came up, and Kitten said that she had never shot one and would like to have a try before much longer. A few minutes later, His Highness got out his jeep and started to drive into Bundi. He drove through the gate and around that curve

just beyond—and there was a panther crossing the road. Well, he turned the jeep right around, and came back and called Kitten, and they both rode back to the curve, and she got it. Only ten minutes after we'd been talking about panthers!”

We had entered the palace and paused in front of a door, which Shambhu threw open, revealing the living room of the Mermaid Suite. During the house party, the suite had been occupied by the Maharajah of Rewa, and one idle afternoon he had permitted me to inspect his quarters. I remember his saying, as he showed me around, “Isn't this gaudy? I tell you, I hardly know myself when I wake up in the mornings.”

Gaudy wasn't exactly the word, but the decorations were certainly unusual. They were, indirectly, attributable to the war. At the time that His Highness of Bundi built Phool-sagar Palace, in the months just after the surrender of Japan, there was a prisoner-of-war camp nearby, and among the prisoners were some Italians who claimed to be experienced painters, plasterers, and muralists. His Highness put them to work on the interior of his new palace, and they left traces of their handiwork all over it. In the Mermaid Suite—consisting of living room, bedroom, dressing room, and bath—they really outdid themselves. I was particularly impressed by the bedroom. There, on the wall above the headboard of the bed, was a painting of a mermaid, perhaps six feet tall, aggressively unclothed, and evidently of Italian extraction on one side of the family, for she had long black hair and strikingly white skin. She was young and slender,

and she was sitting bang in the middle of a vast painted expanse of water. On the lower part of the wall, at each side of the headboard, was a carefully executed lily pad with a large green frog squatting on it, gazing up in admiration at this singular creature. The bathroom was not without its charm, either, for on the wall above the tub were a bevy of naked beauties dancing about in a waterfall. As if this were not enough, the living-room walls were topped off with a frieze of naked girls in silhouette, much smaller than those in the bathroom. The Italian artisans had clearly been away from home a long time.

After showing me where to find that all-important item of Indian interior furnishing—the bell—as well as the switches for the lamps and ceiling fans, Shambhu left me to my unpacking. I didn't get on with it very fast, though. The Mermaid Suite had a restful spaciousness that was completely luxurious after my train trip. What's more, I was in no hurry. Now and then, in a dreamy way, I'd hang up a dress or something, but I was still far from finished when I heard a knock on the door and His Highness's voice asking, "May I come in?"

I opened the door, and the Maharao Rajah of Bundi entered, with a briskness that put me to shame. Looking just as handsome and graceful as he had looked in his evening clothes at the party, he was wearing khaki slacks and a bush shirt printed with polo ponies. As we shook hands, he glanced around the room, checking up on the servants (yes, there were fresh flowers beside the sofa; no, there wasn't any dust on the table). "Are you quite comfortable here?"

he asked. "Ring for anything you need." I assured him that I was extremely comfortable and needed nothing at the moment. As he was about to leave, I asked, "Have you shot that tiger yet?"

He looked puzzled.

"The one that got away during the tiger shoot at your party," I explained.

"Oh," said His Highness. "No, not yet." The only thing of the sort he could report on, he said, was Kitten's panther—had I heard about it? I nodded, and he went on, "As a matter of fact, the palace has been very quiet altogether since the party ended. We noticed it most after you ladies left. It was very sad." His voice took on a tone of exaggerated sorrow. "My friends who stayed on just sat around talking you over. It was so quiet!" I looked at him suspiciously, and he grinned. "Well," he said, "I'll leave you now. I see you aren't quite settled. Dinner will be at about nine o'clock."



"But you're dressed up!" His Highness said to me in dismay when, accompanied by Shambhu Singh, he entered the drawing room where I sat waiting for him that evening. As he went around turning on lamps beside chintz-upholstered easy chairs, I protested that I wasn't dressed up at all. "Naturally, I had to change for dinner," I said. "Especially after a long train ride."

"You must never trouble to dress up while you're here," His Highness said, as severely as if I hadn't spoken. "We are very informal. Take me, now. I merely changed into another bush shirt after tennis. Look, I'm not even wearing shoes."

Life in the palace, I reflected, could fairly be called informal—once you got accustomed to seeing servants bow so deeply that their hands nearly touch the floor, that is, and to having three or four footmen serve each course at table.

"I suppose there are a number of aspects of palace life that, shoes or no shoes, are bound to seem formal to people who have never encountered them before," said His Highness, and I gave a nervous start at the way he had sensed the

drift of my thoughts. "I've heard it said that this kind of life tends to spoil those who are born into it. Perhaps that is true of some people, but I don't think I'm one of them." Turning to Shambhu Singh, he asked, with a trace of uncertainty, "I'm not spoiled, am I?" Shambhu Singh, a little more deliberately than a true yes man would have considered politic, replied that he was not. His Highness nodded approvingly, and went on, "I might have been, though. I used to be. I started out that way. I guess it was the war and Wavell who set me right. Oooh!" He screwed up his face at what was no doubt the memory of a lively interview with the Field Marshal, and made a vivid gesture, slicing the air with his hand, palm down.

Taking a drink from a tray a servant presented to me, I remarked that the Army did seem to have a knack for straightening out spoiled young men. His Highness, who had switched on a radio and was searching vainly for a static-free station, said absently, to the accompaniment of floating scraps of music and voices, "I imagine an English school would have accomplished the same thing before I ever got into the Army, but, of course, I didn't go to school in England. I went to the princes' college—Mayo College—at Ajmer. Most of us did, you know. The idea was that we should be educated in our own country. They found the best masters possible, and the standards were supposed to be up to those of Eton. I wouldn't know about that." He tuned in on Radio Ceylon, a popular station in India—possibly because it specializes in Western music, while Indian disc jockeys conscientiously plug domestic compositions. After

a moment or two, however, static overpowered Ceylon, too, and His Highness turned the set off. "Storms," he announced. Settling back, he looked at me intently, and said, "Now, about food. I happened to notice that you seemed to prefer Indian food when you were here before. Since the guests left, we've been having English food at every meal except Saturday dinner, but this hasn't been working out very well, because it's made the Indian-food cook lazy. So I've decided to have an English lunch and an Indian dinner every day." His Highness and Shambhu exchanged satisfied glances; they were as smug as a couple of housewives who have arranged a party right down to the salted nuts. It was what comes of having one's wife in purdah.

At dinner, His Highness kept the talk going in the traditional manner of British hosts—first a little conversation with me, then a little with the A.D.C., until things warmed up and carried on without nursing. When I'd been at Phoolsagar before, at the party, he had talked almost exclusively about firearms and tigers—two subjects that I can pursue for just so long. But now it was clear that His Highness had talked tiger-shooting at the party simply because most of the other Highnesses were tiger-shooters; in the absence of sporting types, he was quite ready to swap opinions on other subjects—any subject, it seemed, though naturally he had his favorites. One of these was food—not so much eating it as preparing it.

"I like to cook," he said. "I don't get much opportunity here, but when I'm in my flat in London I often try out new dishes. And even here I manage to keep my hand in. How

do you like this cheese, for instance? We make it ourselves, working a special mixture of spices into it. Once, I fooled all my guests at a party with some imitation caviar I'd made, using sago mixed with sauce, and all that, to give it the right taste. Nobody knew the difference."

It occurred to me that perhaps His Highness's guests had merely been too polite to tell him that the caviar was terrible. I turned to another subject—one that I had been wondering about for some time. This was his wife. "I understand she's in purdah, and I'd like very much to call on her," I said. "That is, if it is permitted and is agreeable to her."

His Highness was prompt to reassure me. "Certainly it is permitted, and I'm sure she'd be delighted," he said. "During the house party, she was busy every minute receiving relatives in her quarters. Kitten shall take you. I'll tell her, and she can ask her mother to set a convenient time. Probably morning will be best."

Morning, it seemed, was best—the very next morning, in fact. Shortly after breakfast, the Princess Kitten—small and slender in a white tunic, with thick black hair in a long bob and big eyes made up to look even bigger—came around to the Mermaid Suite to fetch me. She led me along a number of corridors I had not seen before, then up some steps and along more strange corridors, and so into a wing that was cut off from the main building by a series of doors.

An Indian woman in purdah, which nowadays is a voluntary way of life, is not exactly a recluse, or at least she needn't be. She may see as many women visitors as she wishes, and she may see, in another sense, both men and women of all kinds by going out in public, provided that on such excursions she wears a garment called a *burka*, which conceals her face and figure. A *burka* somewhat resembles a ghost's habit or a Ku Klux Klan robe, with a small opening in front of the eyes that enables the woman not only to see where she's going but to breathe—though how effectively may be questionable, for I've heard that the *burka* is

apt to induce tuberculosis. Many highbred women won't walk in the streets even thus barricaded from the public eye, and confine their outings to rides in curtained cars—usually to pay calls on relatives who are also in purdah, or to attend theatres that are fitted out with curtained boxes.

Her Highness of Bundi, a small, pretty woman in a white sari with a flower pattern, was waiting for us in a large and pleasant living room, several windows of which, opening on balconies, commanded a view of a hillside. Like Kitten, she could speak English, but, unlike Kitten, she had little to say; it was plain that if anyone was going to open a conversation, it would not be Her Highness. Over a glass of Coca-Cola, I made a feeble start by observing that I had recently spent an interesting weekend at Agra and asking her if she didn't think it was a lovely place. She hesitated, shook her head, and replied, "I've never been to Agra. You see, I'm in purdah."

I made several other false starts, concerning hotels, and the food served in various parts of the country. Each time, I was brought up short by Her Highness's patient reminder that she had spent her adult life in purdah and so knew nothing about such matters. Since I did not, of course, feel free to question her about the subject that I was most interested in at the moment—her personal life and viewpoint as a woman in purdah—our conversation soon languished; in an effort not to let it die altogether, I went so far as to ask whether she took any part in running the affairs of the rest of the palace. "I never bother about what goes on over there," she replied emphatically, and

that was that. Then Kitten, bless her, came to the rescue, telling us, with a poise that I could only envy, about the school she had attended up until the previous year, when she had been obliged to drop out temporarily, because of her health. I asked her if she hadn't found it rather quiet staying at home, and she replied, "Well, it had been, a little, especially with Peter away at *his* school, but as soon as he's home, things ought to be better. And next term I'll be going back to school, you know. I'm quite well now. It won't be the same school I was at before. This one is for bigger girls. But I'm afraid I'll miss doing what I like the best when I'm home—shooting and taking photographs. Would you like to see my album?"

I said I would indeed, and Kitten ran off to get it. Her mother said softly, "Kitten's nice, isn't she?" and then we both sat in silence with our eyes on the door until the Princess returned. "Here we are," she said, sitting down beside me and opening the album. "They're not very good, because I only have one of those little box cameras, but it's fun. I've just had the latest roll developed, and I haven't had time to paste in the pictures, so they're all here at the beginning. This is the panther. You know about my panther?"

"The one you shot the day before I got here?" I said. "Yes, I know."

At first glance, the photograph resembled all the other photographs one sees of big-game conquests. There was the dead animal stretched out to make it appear as large as possible, and there was the hunter—booted, trousered, and

rakishly hatted—standing over it. But on closer examination this picture was oddly different, for the hunter looked so very young and feminine. I could well imagine what her father and the palace staff must have thought of her in her triumph. Their dead-shot Princess! “You look awfully small there,” I said at last.

“The panther doesn’t look very big, either,” Kitten said. “She was half starved, poor thing—terribly thin. When we spotted her, she was trying to get at some monkeys—climbing a tree after them. Poor little thing!” Her voice was low and compassionate, and now she sighed, looking like an angel of pity. It was hard to reconcile this girl with the proud figure in the photograph, but then keen hunters have always puzzled me; I’ve long since given up trying to understand hunters. So I merely asked if she had any pictures of her tiger—her first tiger.

“Oh, yes,” the Princess said. “Just a minute. I’ll show you.” She turned the pages rapidly. “Here he is,” she said. “Did they tell you that I got him with one shot? The panther, too, and the sambar—I also shot a sambar. It’s a kind of deer. I’ve got his picture here somewhere. Each of them with one shot—so far. Touch wood.”

The Princess began searching for a picture of the sambar, but just then someone knocked on the door, and a maid hurried toward it. Taking no chances, she opened it only a crack, and closed it firmly before returning to report to her mistress in their native language.

Her Highness drew a deep breath. “Again?” she said.



“Oh, those workmen! They’ve already been here once today. I thought they had finished.”

Maid, Kitten, and Highness all looked speculatively around the room; their problem was how to let the workmen pass through into an inner room without letting them catch a glimpse of Her Highness. One obvious solution was for Her Highness to leave the room while the men walked through, but she seemed reluctant to do this; perhaps she didn’t want to make such an issue of the matter in my presence. After a good deal of discussion, another fairly obvious solution was agreed upon, and the maid was directed to tell the men to come back later.

Kitten resumed her quest for the picture of the sambar, which she presently found and I duly admired. That just about exhausted the resourceful Princess’s conversational reserves, so I rose to take my leave. Her Highness walked to the door and stood smiling after us, like a sturdy little Greek figurine. Back in the Mermaid Suite, with its implausible décor, I found it difficult to believe that Her Highness could be living in the same building.

My days at Phoolsagar followed a pattern: breakfast in my rooms, and usually the rest of the morning there, too (though a few times I borrowed the A.D.C. and went sight-seeing); lunch whenever I was called, which might be anywhere from one-thirty to three-thirty (ordinarily, the A.D. C. would knock on my door to announce it, but if it was exceptionally late, His Highness himself would come to summon me, smiling and expressing extravagant regret for the delay); back to my apartment after lunch to lie down on a bed from which the counterpane had been removed in my absence; and then oblivion until between five and six, when I would be wakened by the cries of peacocks. After that, cocktails and dinner, followed by a more random choice of evening diversions.

At lunch a few days after my arrival, I remarked that His Highness looked a bit sleepy, and he said no wonder; he had been up since five. "I received word late last night that there is a tiger on top of the hill behind the palace," he went on. "He'd just killed the buffalo we'd set out as bait for him. So as soon as it was light, I took a camera and climbed the

hill, hoping to get some pictures of him. I'm rather tired of simply shooting tigers, you know, and for some time I've been interested in photographing them. But the tiger didn't show up all morning. He must have been sleeping off his heavy meal. I'll have to try again tomorrow."

"Won't you finally shoot the tiger, though?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," His Highness replied. "One can't leave a tiger around to worry the people of the countryside—not indefinitely. But I'm in no hurry."

His Highness yawned. "I think I'll take a nap," he said. "But how would you like to play a little tennis with us later? Kitten's had permission from the doctor, so she's been practicing her game, and now with Peter back, too—he got here this morning, did you know?—we should have some moderately good tennis."

I said that my tennis was too poor to exhibit, but that I would like to get some exercise. Would it be all right for me to take a walk in the hills, outside the palace grounds?

His Highness said there was no reason I shouldn't go for a walk, and, turning to Shambhu Nath, who was back on palace duty again after bringing Peter home, asked who would be the best person to accompany me. I said that I really would prefer not to have an escort—except as far as the main gate, perhaps, to give me directions.

"That will be quite all right," said my host. "There will be someone waiting for you in the office at five-thirty."

As I approached the office late that afternoon, Shambhu Nath, who had been standing in the doorway, came forward to meet me. In his wake was a young man I had never set

eyes on before. "He will walk with you," the A.D.C. told me. "He speaks English."

The young man nodded and smiled; he was tall and very thin, and wore a small mustache, possibly as a sign of precocity. "Yes, I speak English," he said.

I hesitated, wishing I could think of some polite way of making it plain to both of them that I didn't want anyone, however fluent his English, to walk with me beyond the gate, but Shambhu had probably gone to a lot of trouble to dig up this escort and I had no intention of hurting his feelings. So I made no protest, and set out with the young man at my side.

"You come from where?" asked my companion, shouldering his duty. "Bombay or London?"

"I live in England," I replied. "I was born in America, but I live in England now. I've been visiting in Bombay recently."

"I see. England is a long way from here," the young man said. I agreed, and after a pause he asked, "Have you many tigers in England?"

I had an impulse to say that there were three pretty good specimens in Whipsnade Zoo, but it all seemed too complicated, so I simply replied, "Well, not many. In fact, none running wild, if you understand me."

I don't know whether he understood me or not, but he seemed surprised. And panthers? No panthers, either. He looked even more surprised. And what about bears? I skipped that question, pretending I hadn't heard it, and made a gallant try in another direction, by informing him

that wolves had roamed Britain until not awfully long ago.

"What *other* animals have you?" he asked, trying hard to conceal his contempt for wolves. I let it go.

We had left the gate behind and, instead of following the hillside trail I had hoped for, were clumping along the tar road leading from the palace to the city of Bundi. Surely we could do better than this, and at last I rebelled. "Just a minute, please," I said. "Let's strike off here. I want to climb that hill."

"I wouldn't go up there, if I were you," the young man said. "There might be a tiger at the top. There *is* a tiger in the neighborhood, you know."

"His Highness told me only today that the tiger is on a hill *behind* the palace," I replied, and started up the hill. I made slow progress, for the slope was steep and dry, and halfway up I stopped to catch my breath and to watch a band of monkeys. Before continuing, I glanced back at the young man, and saw such a look of apprehension on his face that I relented. "That's high enough for the first afternoon," I said. "We can work back downhill now."

But even getting back on the tar road did not steady his nerves, for at the sound of a monkey's cough he stopped short and looked fearfully over his shoulder. "Monkeys never make a noise like that except when they know a tiger is not far away," he said in a strangled near-whisper.

We had almost reached the palace gate when we saw a big convertible, with its top down, coming toward us, and we stood aside to let it pass. Seated in back, being driven like little gentlemen, were Kitten and Peter. They waved as

they went by. "They are going to the cinema in the city," explained my escort. A minute or so later, another car swept by, headed in the same direction. This was a Cadillac limousine with its interior hidden from view by flowered-chintz curtains, which flapped in the wind as the car disappeared down the road. Her Highness, too, was going to the movies.

That evening, after listening to a résumé of my walk, His Highness said, "Tiger? Why, the fellow must be crazy. The tiger's on the hill behind the palace."

"I know," I said. "I told him so. He's just overconscientious, I imagine. Tomorrow, if you don't mind, I really would like to go out alone, and if the tiger moves to some other hill in the meantime, perhaps you could let me know? Come to think of it, suppose I *should* happen to meet a tiger someday—what's the best way to behave?"

"A very sensible question," His Highness replied. "The sort of question I used to ask my father when I was a little boy going along on my first shoot. Well, the most important thing to remember is not to run. Stand where you are, and look right at him. If you do that, there's a good chance he'll go away, but if you start running, he's bound to spring at you. Never take your eyes off him." I assured my host that I was hardly likely to, unless it was to squeeze them tight shut in prayer.

As the Princess had anticipated, the presence of Peter, an eager, lean, impulsive lad, brought excitement into her life, and it also gave a lift to the palace household in general. The children had their meals with their mother and slept in her part of the palace, so I usually saw them only in the early evening, but whenever Peter had something that he wanted to discuss with his father, he would turn up in the drawing room before lunch, now and then accompanied by Kitten. One day, for instance, Peter and his sister entered the room wearing stiff, formal expressions, as if they were members of a committee presenting a petition—and, in a way, they were. "Father," Peter said, "may we go into the city this afternoon? They're showing *Hamlet* at the cinema, and we'd like to see it."

"*Hamlet*?" said His Highness. "I didn't know they were showing English pictures there."

"It's not an English picture," Peter said. "It's an Indian version—filmed in India."

"But that's ridiculous," said His Highness. "How could

they possibly translate *Hamlet* into Hindi? It doesn't make sense."

"Well, they have," Kitten said. "And we thought it would be a good idea for us to see it, so we can report on it at school."

Brother and sister stood waiting, their eyes fixed on their father, who considered the request gravely. "Sure it's not a matter of just wanting to go to the pictures—any picture?" he asked at last.

"Oh, quite sure," said Peter, matching his father's gravity. Then he added casually, "Mummie wants to go, too."

"All right, then, but it still sounds ridiculous to me," said His Highness. "Run along."

The children exchanged exultant glances and hurried out. "*Hamlet*, indeed!" said my host. "In Hindi! Not that I have anything against the cinema, when the pictures are good and don't waste a child's time. One that I particularly liked was that old one about Oz. Remember it? I must have seen that picture three times, at least."

Another morning, there was a lot of coming and going in the corridors, and when I met His Highness in the drawing room just before lunch, he told me that a special Hindu ceremony was being held in the city temple. "I should be taking part, but I've sent Peter over to stand in for me," he said. "He must learn." A few minutes later, a young man came into the room, and it took me a moment to realize that it was Peter, appearing strangely elongated in a turban and tunic. He reported on the morning's proceedings to his father, who, after looking him up and down, pronounced his



tunic very smart and dismissed him with an affectionate pat on the shoulder.

Almost daily, once the idea of my leaving the grounds alone had been accepted, I would saunter out toward the end of the afternoon for my solitary walk over one or another of several courses that I had plotted with the help of an A.D.C. and that were designed to get me back just before dark. Sometimes I would start from behind the palace and either climb a slope that rose beyond the garages (I relied on His Highness to warn me away from tigerish hills) or make my way in the opposite direction past the stables and take a dimly defined path leading to a nearby village. Or I would leave by the main gate and head for Phoolsagar Lake. Once I walked around it—a distance of perhaps three miles—coming upon, in succession, a party of monkeys, a limekiln, the village where the workers tending it lived, and the dark-red wall of an old garden. Generally, during my afternoon absences, Kitten and Peter and occasionally their father would get together on the tennis court, and by the time I returned, in the falling dusk, they would be winding up their final game. His Highness was really good—the best player in the palace, even though he didn't have time to practice a great deal. Often, when the play started, he would be off in the countryside inspecting one of his outlying farms or attending to some business over in Bundi, but he always tried to get back before dark so that he could stop by at the court and hit a few balls with his daughter. "Well done, Kitten!" he would call whenever she managed to sustain her

end of a long rally, and the Princess would flush with delight.

His Highness's appearances on the court temporarily ceased about halfway through my visit, owing to a somewhat surprising circumstance: he ran out of tennis rackets. On the evening of the crisis, I was watching him play against Kitten when a ball burst right through the strings of his racket. Disgusted, he threw the racket down, and said that he was through with the game. I asked why he didn't send one of the little ball boys, who were all over the place, for another racket, and it then developed that in the whole palace there were only three rackets. One of them, Kitten's, was in fairly good shape but too light for a man; another, as I had just seen, was grievously in need of restringing; and the third, Peter's, was almost as bad. It looked as though His Highness's tennis-playing days were over. Then, before dinner one night, a solution to his problem came to him in a flash. "I'll buy some new rackets when I'm in Delhi next week," he said. "Kitten, remind me to put it on the list. New rackets."

Meanwhile, Peter continued to play with his decrepit racket. A couple of evenings later, I found the two children playing under an additional handicap as well. One of the little ball boys had been replaced by an old man. Though he had a white mustache—and, no doubt, under his turban, white hair—and his face was wrinkled with age, he was every bit as supple and lively as the youngsters working with him. But he talked. From the time I arrived until darkness put an end to the play, he never stopped talking for an in-

stant. I couldn't understand him, but it was plain that he was scolding Peter and Kitten for not playing better. From time to time, too, he ambled across the court in the middle of a point. The children tried to ignore him, but that was practically impossible, especially when he was making one of his journeys across the court, haranguing them all the while. I went on into the palace, and when I joined His Highness for a drink before dinner, I asked him who the grizzled, critical ball boy was. "You mean the old man?" he said. "He's Peter's dressing boy. Used to be my dressing boy. Yes, he does tell them off a bit, doesn't he?" His tone was indulgent.

Most evenings, after the tennis was over, a small group of us sat outdoors for a while—His Highness, Kitten, Peter, and the A.D.C., and I, and now and then another guest. Perched on little metal chairs around a table just outside the palace entrance, we would drink tea or lemonade or water and watch the stars come out. At one of these gatherings, someone observed that big game was growing scarce in the vicinity of the palace, and I asked His Highness what had become of that tiger he was going to photograph. He replied that the tiger had gone away. "But he'll be back," he added. "He's had two buffaloes now, and he'll remember that. When he's hungry, he'll come back for another meal, and then I'll take his picture—lots of pictures. Then, a few hours later, I think we'll probably go ahead and shoot him. Perhaps we ought to leave that up to Peter. How about it—shall we?"

Kitten said, in her gentle voice, "Actually, it's my turn."

“Well, now, let’s see,” said His Highness. “Peter, when did you get yours?”

Peter said, “Last summer, after Kitten’s.”

“Then it is Kitten’s turn,” His Highness said, and Peter didn’t argue.

O ne morning, almost as soon as I awoke, I became aware that the palace household was preparing for some unusual event; I could sense an air of anticipation long before I left the Mermaid Suite for lunch. It was not that any of the steps in the housekeeping ritual were being slighted but, rather, that the timetable was out of gear; the gardener came early to change the flowers (but he did not forget to include the jasmine blossom he knew I was partial to), the servant who swept the floor came *before* the one who made the bed, and both of them, although they were as silent and gentle as usual, were a little late.

“Mac’s coming,” my host said as soon as I entered the drawing room. “He’s flying up, and is due to arrive at noon tomorrow. We’re going to spend the rest of the day checking my two planes.” Mac apparently stopped in at Phoolsagar Palace every few weeks, but his impending arrival was nonetheless being treated as a novel and important event—because, I suspected, it would give my host a legitimate excuse to play around all afternoon with his planes without suffering pangs of conscience over having wasted his time.

(I had come to realize that His Highness had a streak of almost Presbyterian austerity in him.)

The following day, when I showed up in the drawing room shortly before lunch, I found Mac already there. His Highness was there, too, and in excellent spirits. "Come in, come in!" he called gaily as soon as he caught sight of me. "You and Mac know each other, of course. Well, he's been telling me about the latest development in the flying world—a new helicopter sort of thing that looks just like an arm-chair."

"Great excitement," Mac said as we shook hands. "It seems to be all the rage in flying circles in the States, and my partner and I are trying to get the rights to manufacture it in Bombay. It's the sweetest thing you've ever seen. Works like a combination gyroplane and helicopter. That is, the ones with engines do, but engines cost a lot, and you don't have to have them, because you can use this contraption as a glider—get a tow from a speedboat or a car, and off you go. We think the price of the motorized model may be a bit stiff for a lot of people, so we're going to concentrate on the glider."

"One with an engine would be better," said His Highness wistfully. "Gliding is all right as a hobby, and I like it, but a genuine helicopter would be much more practical. Just think how useful it would be in locating tigers. Oh, I must have one with an engine!"

His Highness and Mac could hardly wait to finish lunch before hurrying over to the airfield to make a nice greasy afternoon of it. On my walk that day, I was pursued all the

way by the noise of planes. Darkness came soon after I got back to the palace, but the planes still hummed and roared. It was quite late, in fact, when His Highness and Mac turned up, scrubbed and ready for dinner. They seemed to be satiated to a certain degree, but soon they were talking about the new helicopter again. "We'll have to manufacture the things in India, you know," Mac explained to me. "Import restrictions."

"I'm going to dream about that armchair helicopter all night," His Highness sighed contentedly. The next morning, Mac took off at dawn for Bombay, having made a sale almost without trying.

One day, in the office of the palace, I came across a brief outline, written in English, of the origin and history of Bundi's royal family—a collection of typewritten notes made by a secretary at the behest (so I was told) of His Highness's late father, and starting off with these two terse sentences:

In A.D. 1342 Rao Dewa, the Hara Prince, took the Banda Valley from the Minas, forced them to acknowledge him as their lord, and named the country Haroutí or Haravati. The Haras are a branch of the Chohans, one of the four Fire-born races created on Mount Abu.

While the notes made it clear that His Highness was a descendant of Rao Dewa, they never went back and elaborated on the Mount Abu incident. A certain amount of explanation was indicated, I thought, but I didn't quite know how to go about getting it. I felt that I couldn't very well ask my host how it happened that his ancestors came to be born of fire; after all, some Westerners might not care to have an



Indian ask them, "What's all this I hear about your God's having fashioned the first woman out of a man's rib?" The only relevant book I had brought with me was John Murray's *Handbook for India*, so I looked up Mount Abu in that. Murray's is a remarkably informative work, but, being primarily a handbook for present-day travelers, all it had to say about Mount Abu was that it is a very pretty hill station. Later, however, I got hold of an older, more scholarly book by James Tod, an Englishman with an American-born mother, who early in the nineteenth century served as Political Agent in the western section of what was then the Indian Agency of Rajputana, or Rajasthan, which included the State of Bundi. Tod fell in love with the region and with its people, and became proficient in Sanskrit, as well as the vernacular, and out of his affection and knowledge came his book—an extraordinary, three-volume work entitled *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han*—in which he painstakingly recorded a number of stories concerning the royal family of Bundi. The Bundi saga, as relayed by Tod, is a long one. I won't undertake to put it all down, but I will try to hit the high spots.

The warrior caste of Rajputs, directly descended from the sun, was already in existence before His Highness's first recorded ancestor was born, but its members had forgotten their obligations and lofty ideals. This so worried the priestly Brahmans that their guru, or leader, presently resolved to regenerate the backsliders by taking drastic action. He thereupon invited the four gods—Indra, Brimha, Rudra, and Vishnu—and all the inferior divinities to accompany

him and a few other leading Brahmans to the summit of Mount Abu, where there was a sacred fountain of fire, and the gods acquiesced, for in those days they usually did what the Brahmans told them to do. When the party reached the top of the mountain, each of the four superior gods in turn approached the fire and threw something into it—a bundle of grass, perhaps, or a roughly modeled clay figure—and each time, after a moment or two, a living being emerged from the flames. The last of these four creatures, who appeared after the god Vishnu threw in his bit, founded the race of Chohans, to which Bundi's ruling family belongs. Like Vishnu, he had four arms, and in each of his four hands he carried a weapon.

I asked His Highness once if he ever made pilgrimages to Mount Abu, and he looked a little surprised. Pilgrimages? Well, not exactly, he said, but his family had long owned a summer place there, and he still spent some time in it now and then, though not very often. "My father used to take us there every year when I was a small boy, and I did the same with my children when they were younger," he told me. "It's a nice place for children—cool, with good air and all that—but for adults it's really awfully dull."

Tod was not at all hesitant about dealing in fairly specific terms with certain events that occurred a long way back, but even he admitted that it was hard to be sure of the accuracy of dates in His Highness's family tree prior to 147 A.D. In that year, however, Tod declared unequivocally, a Chohan founded the city of Ajmer, about a hundred miles from Bundi. The Chohans kept Ajmer for five centuries, and

then the invading Mohammedans captured it. The Chohans were by no means vanquished, though; they liked to fight, and fight they did, for centuries thereafter—against Mohammedans and practically anybody else, with everybody snatching cities and fortresses back and forth. But by 1342 the Mohammedans had installed an Emperor on the throne at Delhi, and most people accepted their rule as a *fait accompli*. One of the nobles at Delhi was Rao Dewa, of the Hara branch of Chohans, who had been such a troublesome, powerful leader that the Emperor had cannily summoned him to live right under the imperial eye. Soon the imperial eye fastened on a magnificent horse owned by Dewa, which the Emperor presently asked for. Dewa rode his mount straight up to the imperial balcony, where the Emperor was holding an audience, and, saluting, said, "Farewell, King. There are three things Your Majesty must never ask of a Rajput—his horse, his mistress, and his sword." With that, he wheeled the horse and galloped away, making for a distant valley of the Banda River, where he was joined by his fellow Haras and, with them, established the city of Bundi.

This plainly is the sort of thing that any man with pride of ancestry and a veneration of antiquity would like to find in his family archives. But Tod has some other stories that might not be so satisfying. One of them concerned an early ancestor of His Highness's named Prince Napuji, who was so taken with a piece of marble owned by his wife's father that he instructed her to ask him for it. The father-in-law—apparently following a Rajput tradition—was immoderately

annoyed by the request, and ordered Napuji not to bother him again. This made the Prince peevish, and he took his peevishness out on his wife, who wrote to her father and complained. To avenge the family honor, her father rode over to Bundi and killed the Prince as he slept, and then headed back home, telling a companion what he had just done. This was a mistake, for he was overheard by a loyal Napuji man, who sprang at him and sliced off his right arm. In the meantime, the body of Napuji had been found, and his wife must have guessed who had murdered him. No doubt she felt proud that the honor of her house had been vindicated, but she well knew that her personal feelings must not interfere with her duty; like any woman of good family, she must die on her husband's funeral pyre, and she immediately prepared herself for the rite of suttee. In the middle of her obligatory last-minute oration to the corpse, in came a vassal carrying the severed arm. The widow recognized it as her father's by a gold bracelet that still encircled the wrist, and though it was now high time for her to walk into the flames, she delayed long enough to deal with this new crisis by calling for pen and paper and writing a letter to her brother in which she urged him to avenge their father. Then, with no further fuss, she went to her death. And the brother, "incapable of revenge," dashed out his brains against a pillar of the hall.

Most people would agree that this is a pretty violent episode to have as part of one's family annals. What His Highness thought of it I do not know, for he never mentioned the matter. He didn't seem to mind discussing the practice of

suttee, though, even when it came close to home. Indeed, he called my attention to the fact that Kipling's ballad on the subject, *The Last Suttee*, was based on an incident that occurred in Bundi. A Bundi prince had died and the British authorities locked up his zenana to restrain the royal wives from rushing out and throwing themselves on the pyre. But one of the prince's wives, more determined than the rest, disguised herself as one of her husband's dancing girls and slipped past the guards. Hurrying to the royal burial ground, she found his body already engulfed in flames. Just at the moment, though, when she should have cast herself into the fire, her nerve failed her, so she did the second-best thing by turning to one of the attendant nobles and asking him to be kind enough to kill her with his sword. Obliging, he did so. Then, as Kipling took it from there,

The little flames and lean,  
Red as slaughter and blue as steel,  
That whistled and fluttered from head to heel,  
Leaped up anew, for they found their meal  
On the heart of—the Boondi Queen!

**T**he Kshar Bagh, or Memorial Garden—the royal burial ground where this happened and where all the members of the princely family are buried—is not far from Phoolsagar Palace. Shambhu Singh drove me over to visit it one afternoon, and on the way he called my attention to one of a large number of stone monuments, called *chhatris*, that dot the landscape around Bundi. “*Chhatri*” means “umbrella,” which, in certain circumstances, is a very sacred article in India. The stone *chhatris* may actually be umbrella-shaped, or they may simply be arched roofs or shelters of some other design; one sees them in many parts of India, usually hovering over pieces of sculpture—statues of Buddha, of contemporary notables, even of Queen Victoria and subsequent English kings. Many of the *chhatris* in the vicinity of Bundi, however, hover over nothing but open ground, having been erected as memorials in themselves. “That one over there to the right commemorates a very holy widow,” Shambhu said. “She died in suttee. Of course, that isn’t done any more. It must have been a terrible sight.”

Before long, Shambhu pulled up in front of a small open

doorway in a high brick wall, and we got out. Going through the doorway was like stepping onto a stage; at any rate, there was an abrupt change in the atmosphere. It was darker in the Kshar Bagh than outside; the day was getting on toward late afternoon, and the wall was so high that the sun's rays missed a part of the burial ground altogether, and much of the part they still reached was overshadowed by trees or by *chhatris*. Though the earth outside the Kshar Bagh had been parched, I now had the sensation of damp mossiness. We stood near one end of the cemetery and looked down an avenue flanked by imposing tombs—great rectangular masses of flat, smoothly fitted stones, with *chhatris* over them. On the larger *chhatris* were sculptured friezes, in high relief, of elephants and horses and people. Interspersed among the big sheltered tombs were smaller ones, without *chhatris*—for lesser queens, Shambhu said, and for children.

We strolled down toward the far end of the avenue. An old man, the guardian of the place, had joined us and followed along quietly—all was quiet. After we turned and started back, Shambhu gently broke the silence to say that a huge tomb and *chhatri* near the entrance marked the grave of Rao Chhattarsal, on whose pyre sixty-four ladies of the court had immolated themselves; the Kshar Bagh couldn't have been so quiet that day, I reflected. Then I reminded myself that the peacefulness of the place was not necessarily permanent even now; standing there in the quiet, in the half light of the setting sun, I had been lulled into thinking of the Kshar Bagh as a sort of museum—even an anachro-

nism. But it is neither of those things, and not far away was the proof of it—a new *chhatri* in the making. Massive stone pillars lay on the ground, waiting to be hoisted into place over a tomb—all new, yet exactly like the ancient ones a few feet away. “This is for His late Highness’s father’s father,” Shambhu explained. “Each Highness builds the *chhatri* for his great-grandfather.”



**T**hat evening, I reported to His Highness that I had paid a visit to the Kshar Bagh and that I thought it incredibly beautiful. He looked pleased. "Yes, it is," he said. "I hope, of course, that when the time comes I shall be buried there, too."

I remarked that I had especially admired the *chhatri* he was building for the tomb of his great-grandfather.

"I'm glad you did," His Highness said. "I like to think that someday a great-grandson of mine will be building my *chhatri*—but who knows?"













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